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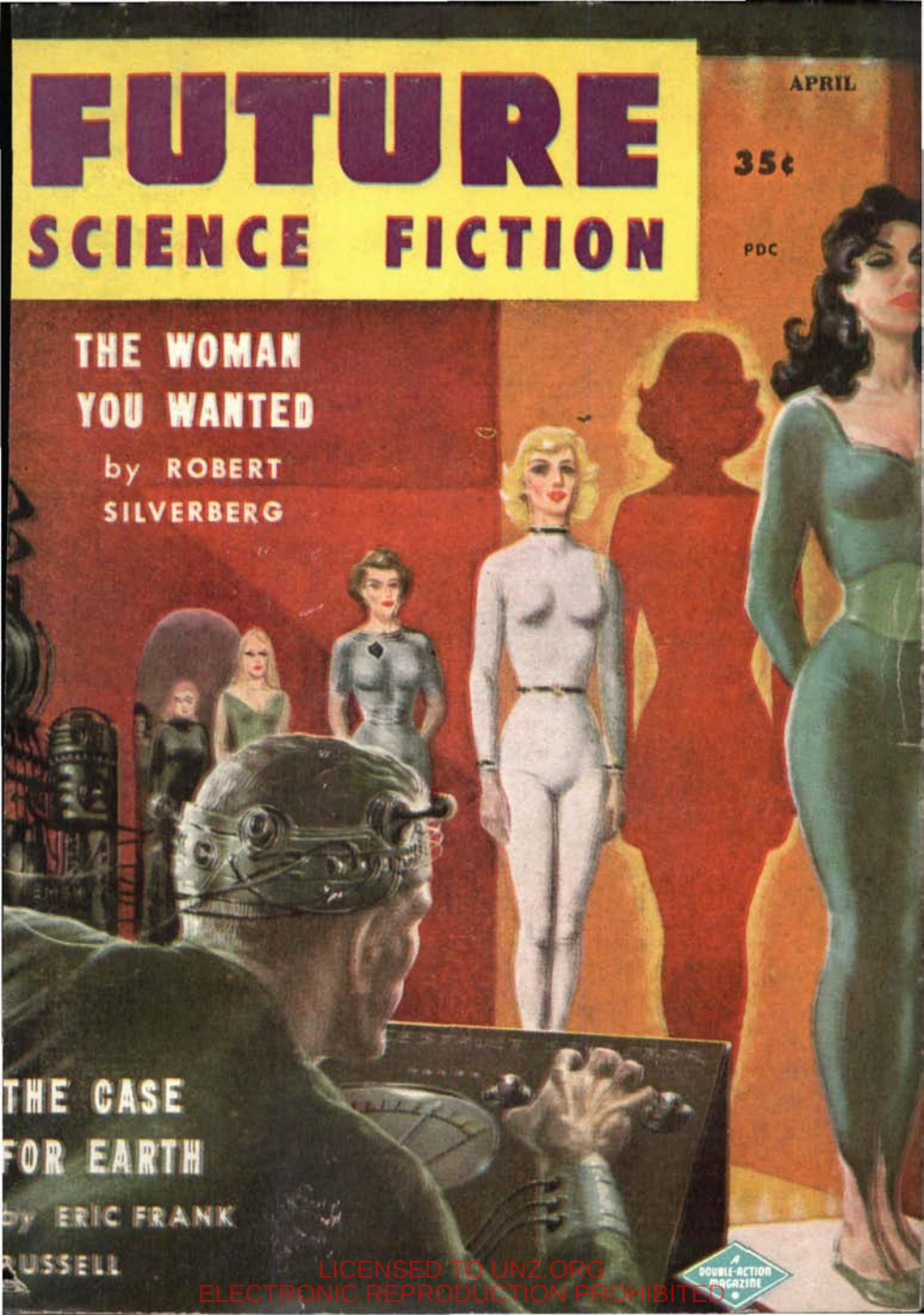

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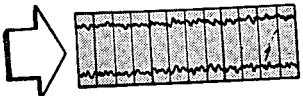

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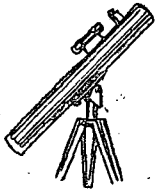

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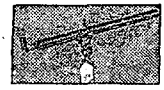

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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

No. 36
April,
1958
35¢

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Editor: ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES — DOROTHY B. SEADOR, Asso. Ed.

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AUTHOR, AUTHOR!

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL is the author of the story your editor chose to illustrate quality of style and characterization in the symposium on science fiction that appeared in the 1957 *Writers Yearbook*. One of Russell's many virtues is his ability to give a fresh slant on a theme that has been handled frequently by other authors, and I think he's done it again.

DON BERRY was introduced to our readers in the August 1957 issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly*, by way of an ingenious time-travel tale about Sir Isaac Newton. While his main efforts are in other fields, I think we'll see more of him in science fiction.

GEORGE H. SMITH has a knack for the unusual, and his stories do not require more than the short-short lengths for the most part. However, when he has a theme which can take somewhat longer treatment, I think you'll agree that he can handle it.

RON SMITH is the publisher of the award-winning *Inside*, one of the finest of amateur efforts for the science fictionist.

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the woman you wanted

by Robert Silverberg

illustration by EMSH

He'd go into the Interstellar Survey Commission, make good money, and be accompanied by the woman of his dreams! But Bradmire wasn't entirely convinced...

THE OFFICES of the Interstellar Survey Commission were on Greek Street, just off Soho Square. The day that Bradmire decided to sign up for a Commission post was a warm, almost muggy one—unusual for London in late August—and he felt strangely clammy as he left his Bayswater flat and waited opposite Hyde Park for the Number Seventeen bus.

He thought of all he was giving up. Not much, was it, really? A handful of friends, all of them at loose ends much like himself. Books—well, he could take some with him.

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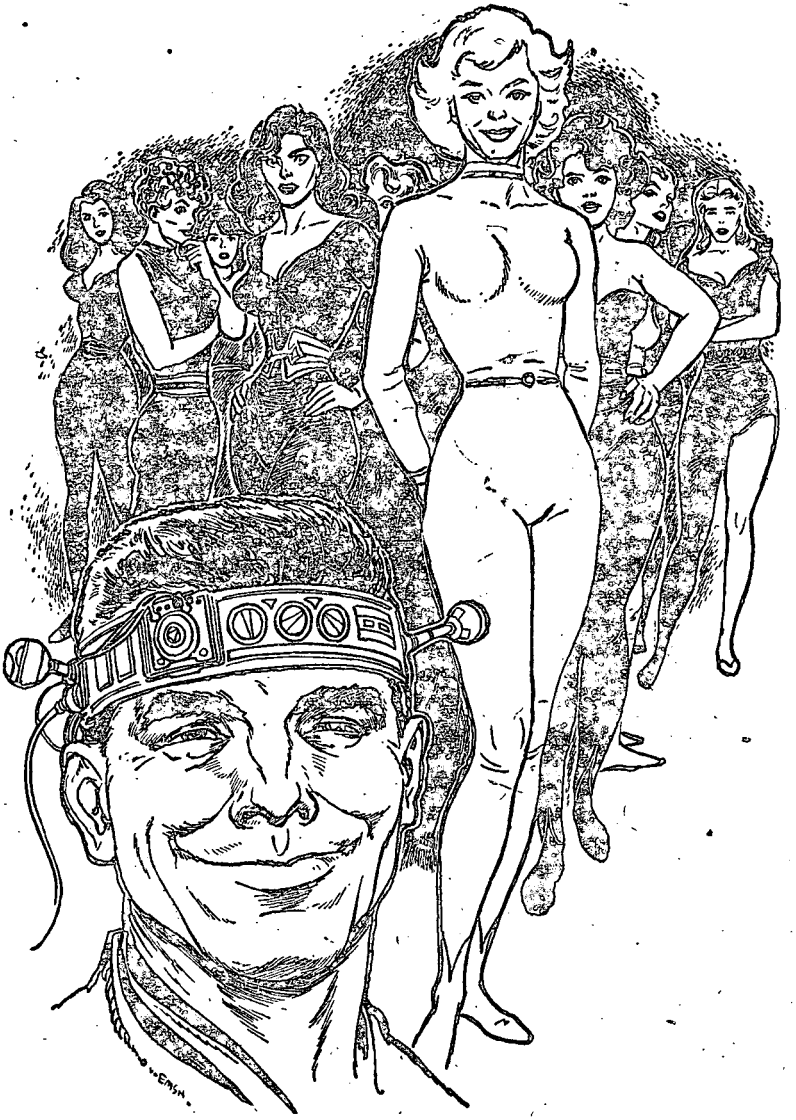

The other girls gathered bewilderedly around Bradmire's choice . . .

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Music—that, too. No more concerts at dear shabby old Royal Festival Hall, but he could take musicdisks with him on the trip. The Commission were *very* good to the young men who signed up. The eight-year tour of duty was worth fifteen thousand quid, tax-free; that was good pay, all things considered, and the work was fascinating.

A lot better than living in an archaic London flat and scribbling poetry. A lot better than spending afternoons in the British Museum and evenings writing critical essays for ephemeral little magazines. Bradmire was slowly coming to the realization that the London literary life was not for him. In the Cambridge days, it had been fine to look forward to London—but now he was here, and it was merely hollow and irritating to him.

So he would go to space. He would become a planet-rover, and record data as a minion of the Survey Commission; and perhaps when he returned he would write a best-seller and live in peace and plenty in some Cornwall town.

THEY WOULD make a fuss over him as he signed the contract. Others had told him how it was. They gave you a fistful of pound notes and told you to go out and enjoy yourself for a week; they clucked over you as they found out what you would want by way of comforts on the trip; and they psych-tested you for your android companion—

Who would be the woman of his dreams. The tests were infallible; they always gave you the woman you wanted, synthetic of course, to aid you in stability-maintenance during the long trip. Bradmire was slightly doubtful about making love to an android, but one of his more decadent friends had already tried it and said it was almost like the real thing—and after a while, no doubt, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference.

He wondered. There was a grim, almost fatalistic smile on his face as he spied the Number Seventeen bus topping the rise in the hill. Low-slung, a humming teardrop, it came toward him and stopped as he waved his hand at it. He clambered aboard.

"Wardour Street," he told the robot-conductor.

"Sixpence," said the blank-faced metal being.

Bradmire dropped one of the shiny little copper coins into the slot, entered the passenger section of the bus, and tumbled into his seat. The bus sped along down Bayswater Road toward Marble Arch, and thence into the archaic hodgepodge that was London's West End.

HE EXAMINED his money. Two copper sixpences, one of the old silver

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kind; a florin; a pair of pennies, and a bright gold guinea. Twenty-four shillings and eightpence, of which one of the pennies—the battered old large-size Charles III piece—was his good-luck coin, and therefore unspendable. It wasn't very much cash at all. And there wouldn't be any money forthcoming from the publishers for at least a week, by which time he would be very hungry indeed.

His back was to the wall. He had no choice but to sign up.

Let Marian and John and Kenneth and the others chide him for selling out, he thought doggedly. *Let* them. He was tired of bohemianism—and with all of the universe waiting to be explored, it was hopelessly provincial to remain in London.

HE GOT OFF the bus at Wardour and walked east along Oxford Street, turning south and taking a twisting route through Dean onto Greek Street. The Commission building was one of the new ones, tall and gleaming, fronted with glossy plastic, that had been erected in Soho in the last decade; the architect had inscribed a glittering gold "2129" on the facade for the benefit of future historians.

Bradmire fingered the card in his pocket. It bore the name of Sir Adrian Laurence, Recruiting Chairman. Suite 1100. He moistened his lips nervously.

The double doors swung open at his approach. A robot waited inside, seven feet tall and mirror-bright. Bradmire felt unutterably shabby. He straightened his tattered frock coat and said, "Suite 1100, please."

Of course, the robot's expression did not change, but it seemed to Bradmire that it had smiled condescendingly as it said, in suave Oxford tones, "Naturally, sir. The grav tube on your left."

"T-thank you," Bradmire stammered. He had never been sure whether robots were entitled to politeness.

He stepped into the grav tube and drifted upward to the eleventh floor; there he was deposited in a shining corridor. A vast door loomed above, with an immense *1100* inscribed on it. Bradmire went forward.

THE DOOR rolled back when he was within a foot of it, and he found himself confronted by a blonde receptionist of quite unnerving proportions. He wondered whether she, too, were an android.

"May I help you?" she asked sweetly.

"I'm—looking for Sir Adrian Laurence," he blurted. "I want to sign up. I mean..."

"I understand," she said, and it seemed to Bradmire

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that she did. "Come this way, please?"

She led him down a brightly-lit foyer; he followed, studying her construction avidly, and deciding that if she were a sample of Commission androids he wouldn't object to getting one. "May I have your name, please?" she asked as they reached a broad oak door.

"Bradmire. David H. K. Bradmire."

She inclined her head toward a minute speaker-grid set into the rich oak and said, "Mr. David Bradmire to see you, Sir Adrian."

The door opened. Bradmire stared at a man of his own height, fiftyish, with a baronet's yellow wig and a strikingly modern blue-and-red dress suit. "Won't you come in, Mr. Bradmire?"

The office was furnished in the best of taste. Bradmire took a seat in a quivering web hammock facing Sir Adrian's desk and said, "You know why I'm here, of course. I want to sign up for a Commission post."

"Excellent! Drink?"

BRADMIRE accepted a cognac and a cigar as if he were fully accustomed to such luxuries before noon every day. He leaned back comfortably. He felt fully at ease, now, with no lingering doubts.

"What is your profession, Mr. Bradmire?"

Bradmire grinned. "I'm a poet and essayist, Sir Adrian. Came down from Cambridge in '29. Average income, 2129-2132, three hundred fifty pounds per annum. So I'm throwing in the towel."

Sir Adrian's face darkened. "You know that's not really so, of course. You aren't giving up your ambitions. You're merely—shall we say—*postponing* them until you're more mature. How old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"Ah. You'll return from the stars at age thirty-four, still a young man in today's world. You'll be wealthy—fifteen thousand pounds, plus accrued interest. You'll have a vast store of experience; you'll have seen dozens of bizarre alien worlds, gone places and done things few of your poetic contemporaries have done. And you'll have the comforting knowledge that you have done something valuable for society. *Then* you'll be able to create, David! You'll have something to say to humanity—and humanity will listen, and reward you!"

BRADMIRE admitted to himself that Sir Adrian made it sound remarkably attractive—desirable, in fact. Not at all the hopeless last-resort gesture he had seen it as. He felt adrenalin surging through his body.

He said, "I'm roughly fa-

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miliar with the terms, but would you run through them again...?"

"Of course." Sir Adrian knotted his hands together, smiling. "You sign on for an eight-year term, of which the first three months is spent in preliminary instruction. We supply you with a small two-person scoutship which is equipped with an automatic course computer. There'll be nothing for you to do but wander from star to star and beam reports to us on planetary systems, possible life forms, and so forth. We need thousands of men to do this work, which is why the terms are so attractive.

"Your pay is fifteen thousand pounds, placed on deposit for you at Lloyd's and collectible on the day of your return. It's tax-free. You'll also be supplied with whatever books, musicdisks, or other recreational equipment you desire." He paused. "And also, our laboratories will furnish you with a female android companion who will be as close to your desired specifications as modern science can manage."

"It *has* to be an android, sir? I mean, I couldn't take any human girl I happened to know..."

"THEORETICALLY, you could, of course. But the requirement is that she must come within .0001 of your subconscious specifications, and we find in practical application that such women are *extremely* rare. But the manufactured synthetics are—ah—highly desirable, and fully human in all but their origin."

"Suppose I—don't want any companion. What if I want to go it alone?"

"Impossible, I'm afraid. Our ships are expensive, and we can't take the risk of losing any. Solitaries are inherently unstable. The sort of man we want is mentally alert, gregarious, well-balanced, and—ahem—normally heterosexual. It's been our experience that other types don't provide satisfactory performances."

Bradmire chuckled. "I don't know how well-balanced I am, but I can testify to the heterosexual part."

"I hope so. If you accede to our terms, we can test you in a matter of seconds to judge your suitability. Another drink?"

"Don't mind if I do," Bradmire said.

THREE HOURS later, and quite some miles away, Bradmire finished what he had to say with, "...so I signed up." It was early in the afternoon; he sat in The Kenya, one of London's cozy old *espresso*-houses, in South Kensington near Exhibition Road. He sipped his cappucino and smiled at the little group of friends around the table.

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"And they gave you fifty pounds expense money?" John Ryson asked incredulously. He was a slim, pale lad, down from Cambridge like Bradmire, who had been working intermittently on an immense narrative poem for the past four years. "Fifty pounds just to throw away in a week?"

"You saw the notes," Bradmire said. "Ten crisp little green fivers. Ten pretty little portraits of Queen Diane." He scooped three gold guinea coins from his pockets and stacked them on the table. They represented change from his first purchase, a box of cigars for his friends. He tapped the gleaming profile of Henry X and grinned in cheerful commerciality. "I hope you'll pardon this rather vulgar display on my part, chums. But it's been years since I last had three of these little things all at the same time, and I feel like crowing about it."

"Fifteen thousand when you get back," Bert Selfridge muttered. He was thirty-two, going prematurely gray, with a sharp little beard. He taught Remedial Grammar at University College. "A fortune! And for what? Chasing around from star to star, looking for little green men."

"JEALOUS, ART? Why don't you sign up, then? Surely what I'll be doing is just as valuable to humanity as teaching the rudiments of our language to a bunch of rebellious would-be chemists and engineers."

"Aren't you giving up too much, though?" Ryson wanted to know. "Eight solid years..."

"But there's no reason why I can't write during that time. And I'll have no room and board problems, and no yammering landladies or squalling back-alley tomcats. And the company of my perfect woman."

"Perfection can get tiresome," Selfridge said half to his beard.

"Have you tried it?" Bradmire retorted.

"When are you leaving, David?" asked Marian Hawkes.

Bradmire glanced across the table at her. She was a quiet girl with a deep, soft, easy-to-listen to voice—but she rarely spoke. She was either terribly shy or terribly arrogant, Bradmire had decided earlier; either way, the effect was the same.

"At the end of this week," he said. "I passed the first battery of psychological tests this afternoon. All they do is strap a funny hat on your head and throw a switch, and *bzzz!* A meter ticks, and you're either in or out. I was okayed."

"WHAT ARE the qualifications?" Marian asked.

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"Not very much," Bradmire told her. "Good health, sound mental outlook, general stability. And heterosexuality."

"They didn't have to test you for that," Tyson said. "We could have given them affidavits for you."

Bradmire chuckled. He had always had a reputation as a ladies' man—and, as is usually true in such cases, the reputation was far in excess of actuality, through little fault of his own. "They insisted on doing it their way." He smiled. "In two days I go back to—ah—get fitted for my android light-o'love. At the end of the week, it's off to indoctrination camp in Scotland for three months, and then into the great beyond. Eight years from now I return, rich, muscular, space-bronzed."

"And we can come to you for loans," Selfridge said. "You won't forget your poor old arty friends."

"Not if they're still arty and hungry," Bradmire said. "But I suspect I won't find any of you here when I get back. You'll all have taken the same route I did."

"All except Marian," said Ryson. "She isn't eligible. Or is she?"

Bradmire shook his head, grinning. "Women aren't wanted for this job. Men only—with a plastoprotein girlfriend built to specs." He rose and glanced at his watch. The time was 1400.

"Gentlemen—and lady—I'm tired of drinking coffee, and no doubt so are you. I move we adjourn next door to the *George and Dragon*. We've got an hour till closing time—and the drinks are on me!"

HE WOKE with quite a head the next morning, but he had invested half-a-crown in some anti-hangover tablets; and after he popped one of the little green lozenges back of his tongue he felt much better about things. He depolarized his window and stared out. The sun—*imagine it*, he thought, *the sun shining in London!*—poured through the opening. The streets were damp, though; it had been raining. He wondered whether they would ever manage to get London's weather under control, the way they had done in—say, New York. Probably not. But it would be nice to come home, eight years hence, to a London in which the damnable rain fell on a neat predictable schedule that could be published in advance each day in the *Times*.

He donned his clothes and fumbled through his pockets for his cash. He found four crumpled five-pound notes and a handful of guinea pieces and small change—all that was left out of his fifty quid expense-money. He realized he had spent as much last night as he had in the whole last month, practically.

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BOOKS LITTERED the room, and some new musicdisks, and a few empty wine-bottles. He saw that at some time during the previous day he had acquired a new cravat—*whatever for,* he wondered, *where I'm going?*—and that he had stained his clothes with what might have been spilled champagne.

Well, the Commission had intended him to have a good time, and he had certainly succeeded. He had scattered the shillings like a new Maecenas; and though he scarcely remembered what had happened, he imagined it must have been a grand night for all. John had been there, and Art, and Kenneth, and Marian Hawkes, and that other little slip of a girl with the improbable figure, and two or three others. The word had gone round London that Bradmire had had a windfall, and all his friends had gathered round to join in the fun.

He remembered arguing Yeats versus Synge bitterly with a verse playwright named Buxton; he remembered swilling barley wine with a blubbery Celtic bard from Glasgow—or was it Dublin? And he remembered kissing someone under a table; Marian Hawkes, maybe, or else that girl Joanne. Well, it didn't matter which one, or why. Come the end of the week, nothing much of his past life would matter at all.

He picked up a book, neat and bright in its jacket. A poetry anthology, thick and costly; he'd coveted it a long while, and now it was his—just for putting his name on a paper that promised away his next eight years. Someone had spilled a little champagne on the book, too. That was too bad, but in a way he liked the idea of having some tangible souvenir of last night's celebration.

THE PHONE rang. He snatched it off the hook before it had rung twice, and said, "Bradmire here."

"David, this is Sir Adrian Laurence. Of the Survey Commission, you know."

"I haven't forgotten, sir."

"Good. I trust you've been enjoying yourself since yesterday morning?"

"Very much so," Bradmire said, grinning. "It's a long time since I've had fifty quid all in one lump."

"Poverty's a thing of the past as far as you're concerned, son. But I wanted to remind you: you have an appointment with us tomorrow at noon. To select your companion, you remember."

"I haven't forgotten *that* either," Bradmire said. "Do I report at your office?"

"That won't be necessary. Room 707's the place to go. I'll be waiting for you there."

IT *HAD* been Marian Hawkes he had kissed, and not the other girl, after all.

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He found that out that evening, when the group assembled in a pub near Clerkenwell Road and Hatton Garden, and then wandered westward toward the Bloomsbury flat of publisher's assistant Kenneth Prior. By that time there were seven or eight in the group, and Bradmire—who was happily down to two guineas by this time—found himself walking along Theobalds Road with Marian.

"Do you still think Yeats' plays were all that *good*?" she asked. "Or was it just the barley wine that got you so enthusiastic?"

"What's that? Oh—yes." He chuckled wryly. "I guess I *did* get a little too passionate and lose some of my critical objectivity. But I hardly remember most of the things I did last night."

There was a sly tone in her voice as she said, "I wonder just how much of last night you've forgotten."

He smiled. They turned up into Great Russell Street, and he started walking a little faster so they could catch up with the rest of the group. He found himself liking this soft-spoken girl, and he knew that was dangerous; in four days he'd be departing, and this was no time to start any emotional relationships. Especially not after having ignored the girl for the year he had known her.

But somehow he found himself hoping that his synthetic android would be rather like Marian Hawkes—tall, willowy, well built, with a soft deep voice and a sly sense of humor. He wouldn't mind spending eight years in a two-man spaceship with someone like that.

IN FACT, he found himself kissing her again that night. Some time after that, he argued Yeats versus Synge again, and landed a sound punch in Buxton's well-padded belly when words grew too hot. Sometime after that he had wandered across the city, not alone, into Victoria Embankment, and tossed a guinea piece into the Thames under the shadow of Scotland Yard. After that, he recalled crossing Waterloo Bridge and wandering round the slums of Southwark, and then doubling back over Westminster Bridge, watching the sun rise while walking by the Serpentine, and getting home to his flat just before 0700.

He slept three hours, waking at ten, and dressed and breakfasted. He surveyed his holdings and found that last night left him with the sum of seven and ninepence. Well, no matter, he thought; Sir Adrian had said he could have more expense money if he ran through the first fifty pounds.

He took the underground tube at Lancaster Gate, and got off at Tottenham Court Road. Precisely at noon, red-

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eyed and weary but keenly anticipating what was to come, he presented himself at Room 707 in the Survey Commission building.

IT LOOKED like a very ordinary office. There was an attractive receptionist back of the desk, and a framed solido of King Henry on the wall. Sir Adrian was waiting for him, along with a smiling little man with disconcerting green eyes and a white smock.

Sir Adrian introduced him as Dr. Hammersmith, the Commission's Chief of Testing. Hammersmith stared at him with coolly-appraising eyes, as if giving him an on-the-spot psych-testing. Then he said, in clipped Scots tones, "Very good. Will you come this way please, Mr. Bradmire?"

He was led on into an inner office that was dark; Hammersmith nudged a stud and subtle electroluminescents fluttered into life, revealing a truly startling quantity of ponderous apparatus. It seemed to Bradmire that one entire wall of the big office was devoted to a monstrous pile of frightening gearwork: massive tubes and coils and strangely-throbbing lights, dials and meters, electromagnets and unidentifiable mechanisms.

"Is that thing—for me?" he asked in a hushed voice.

Hammersmith smiled. "It does look a little imposing, doesn't it? Yes, that's our psych-tester."

He gestured toward a desk in the back of the office and said, "Would you sit there, please?"

Bradmire did so—and noticed that it was no desk, but rather an additional machine covered with dials and indicators. He lowered himself with some trepidation into the chair riveted to the floor in front of it, observing that a formidable array of devices seemed to be installed right behind him.

He grinned feebly. "What's going to happen?"

SIR ADRIAN said, "We're going to let you choose a mate. The Singestault Selector makes our job a good deal easier and quicker."

"What do you mean? How do you go about designing androids?"

Hammersmith said, "We keep fifty or sixty basic androids on hand in the building at all times. We're going to march them through this office while you analyze them with the Selector, and we'll pick out the one who most approximates your ideal. Usually it's possible to find one that has an index of correlation of, say, 77%. We earmark her for you and send the others back to storage. Then, by using the data the Selector has received from you, we make psychical and physical alterations in her until her

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Selector score is 99.999%. Then she's yours—the woman you wanted."

Bradmire felt strangely unnerved by Hammersmith's bland confidence. "Suppose," he said in a hoarse voice, "suppose there isn't any android in stock who correlates better than fifty percent. What then?"

Hammersmith shrugged. "Then we design one from scratch for you. But this takes much longer; it's far easier to begin with a standard model and custom-shape her. Sometimes we come quite close."

"A boy in here last week," Sir Adrian said, "found an android who was within 95% of his ideal. All we had to do was add an inch of bosom and give her a tape on famous cricket stars and she was perfect for him. Of course, it's rarely that simple. Shall we begin?"

"I—I guess so," Bradmire said. His fingertips felt cold; he felt irrationally tense. "We might as well get started."

HAMMERSMITH lowered a sort of crown over his head—a recording instrument, some kind of electroencephalograph. There were other detectors attached to his wrists and ankles. He felt as if he were being prepared for execution, not for finding a perfect mate.

"Keep your hands on these buttons," Hammersmith said. "They'll register changes in skin temperature. We'll also be picking up pulse alterations, adrenalin counts, and eighty or ninety other things. It's foolproof."

He stepped back and threw a master lever. Bradmire heard a humming sound as all the complex machinery around him came to life. The needle on the Singestault Selector's main gauge fluttered momentarily and dropped back to zero.

In front of him and overhead a battery of lights flashed on, creating a hazy sort of field—with a woman's silhouette in the middle of the field. Quite a handsome silhouette too, Bradmire thought.

A door opened. A girl stepped out and began to walk with measured steps toward the silhouette.

SHE WAS tall and dark of complexion, and she wore a skin-tight two-piece outfit that hid absolutely nothing of her long, curved legs and high bosom. Her hair was cropped short; her nose was a bit too long, and there was something faintly haughty about her eyes. She looked human, all too human, and Bradmire would not have objected to having her.

She passed through the silhouette. She was a bit too tall and a trifle too narrow in the hips. Bradmire glanced down

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at the detector. It was registering only 58%. A long way from his ideal, evidently.

But the Commission had plenty of other girls, it seemed. Narrow-hips passed on through the field and out of the room, and already another was advancing—short, buxom, with a liquidly undulating way of walking. Bradmire had never cared much for short girls. This one rang up 32% on the gauge, and passed on.

There was a wide and varied assortment. Short ones, tall ones, blondes, brunettes, some with hair of no color he had ever seen. Some who came through the field brazenly nude, others prudishly concealed. Haughty ones, shy ones, farmgirl-type ones. Girls in evening gowns and girls in spacesuits and girls in nothing at all.

Dozens of them must have gone by. Sweat dribbled down Bradmire's face, and the apparatus strapped to him felt oppressively heavy. He had lost all count and had no idea which had scored what. An icy, regal-looking one had tallied the low score, 11%, and a slim long-haired brunette in tight rubberoid halter and tights had recorded 69%, the high so far. Bradmire wondered how long it would go on, and whether he would find anyone who outscored the 69-percenter. As far as he was concerned, the brunette would do, in a pinch.

A NEW GIRL was coming out; they moved in endless series. This one was a tall blonde, clad in rubberoid from neck to ankles—revealing thereby both a sense of modesty and a startlingly good figure. Her eyes were wide and clear, her smile elfin.

Bradmire felt an inward tingle. He looked down at the Selector. The needle was oscillating wildly and coming to rest someplace above the 98% level.

He looked back at the platform, at the girl. She was standing in the Selector field, and the silhouette framed her almost perfectly.

And something else was quite surprising. She was a perfect double for Marian Hawkes.

"HOLD EVERYTHING," Bradmire said loudly. "This looks like the one. The Selector says she's almost perfect—and I agree!"

The lights went on suddenly. Bradmire blinked and looked around. Sir Adrian and Hammersmith were paying no attention to him; a white-smocked technician had burst into the office.

He was shouting, "Dr. Hammersmith, there's been a mistake! A human girl got in the android lineup by mistake! We were checking the potentials, and one of the last ones nearly blew out our board!"

So that explains it, Brad-

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mire thought. *It isn't Marian's double at all. It's Marian. But how—and what—and why...?*

Confusion seemed to be ruling in the testing laboratory. The android girls had all re-entered, and were milling about in alarm. Hammersmith was swearing. Above everything else, Bradmire heard Sir Adrian's commanding voice: "How could something like that happen?"

The hapless technician shrugged. "She just slipped through, that's all. But it's easy enough to find out who it is. We just look for the one who has a navel, and that's our girl."

"Very well," Sir Adrian thundered. "Bradmire, I'm sorry about all this. We'll have to check."

"But look here, sir—I hit better than 99% on that last girl. She's obviously the one I want."

"Hmm." Sir Adrian and Hammersmith examined the selector gauge. "Most unusual, eh? Which girl was the one who got this score, Bradmire?"

"That one, sir."

He pointed to Marian, who stood gravely in the midst of the android girls, trying her best to look like one of them.

HAMMERSMITH removed the paraphernalia that bound Bradmire, and he crossed the room to her.

"All right, the rest of you!" Sir Adrian snapped. "Let's see your stomachs. And there's trouble waiting for the one who isn't a laboratory product!"

At Marian's side, Bradmire whispered, "How the deuce did *you* get into that lineup?"

She smiled. "Last night you gave me ten guineas for a bottle of champagne. I put it to a better use, and bribed one of the technicians to let me in."

"But how did you know the machine would pick you?"

"It didn't take a machine, silly. Everyone knew it but you, all along. This was my last chance, wasn't it?"

Bradmire grinned at her and turned around. The android girls had formed into a line again, only now fifty bare and navelless feminine stomachs were revealed. It was a somewhat dazzling sight.

"Odd," Sir Adrian said. "They *all* seem to be synthetics, all right. But the detector-board said—ah. There's one other."

He looked at Marian. "Kindly unzip, young lady."

Bradmire stepped forward and said, "I don't think that will be necessary, Sir Adrian."

"What?"

"She may or may not be an android; I'm not sure myself. But the Selector plainly says she's the woman I wanted. I don't think we need to continue this session any further."

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"But if there's been a violation..."

"Does it matter, if she's human?" Bradmire said. "The thing that counts is the compatibility index. And that's pretty close to perfect."

And I should have seen that a long time ago, he thought.

SIR ADRIAN looked puzzled; but then, he began to laugh. "I begin to understand. Very well; the Selector tells the truth—and we'll overlook any irregularities in the procedure. Dr. Hammersmith, the session's over. And if you two will follow me to my office, we'll assign you to Indoctrination for Survey work."

As they left, Bradmire whispered to the girl, "You *are* Marian Hawkes, aren't you? Not just a clever android imitation? I mean..."

She giggled deliciously. "The only way to find that out is to look for my navel, isn't it?"

He reached for her belt. She slapped his wrist gently. "Not here, silly. Later. We'll have plenty of time for things like that on the way to Betelgeuse."

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Editorial

YESTERDAY'S WORLD OF TOMORROW: 1928

IT WAS A year when all seemed well with the world, and the age-old problem of poverty had been cornered—at least in the United States. The rich were getting richer, but at last it looked as if the poor would have a share in the pie; a working man could buy stock on margin and watch his money create money.

A President did not "choose to run", hoping to be drafted, and was bitterly disappointed when his party took him at his word and chose an engineer to control the forthcoming destiny of the greatest nation on Earth. Readers of imaginative literature read about the flight of the *Graf Zeppelin* across the Atlantic, and perhaps wondered if Victor MacClure's *"Ark of the Covenant"* might come true, partially at least. A racing car attained the barely believable speed of 218 miles per hour; and in the cinematoriums, virtually all new films had sound effects. The 100 per cent "talking" picture, as a permanent thing, would follow soon.

A silent film, made in Germany, thrilled science-fictionists; some had seen it last year, (1927) but "Metropolis" could still be found in many movie theaters in 1928.

Few saw danger signals on the horizon, and those few who produced facts and figures to show that the card house of "prosperity" might collapse at any moment—and was bound to collapse in any event—were brushed aside. A group of specialists urged President Coolidge to take some urgent and necessary measures to avoid

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economic catastrophe; they were stared down.

SCIENCE FICTIONISTS greeted a second all science-fiction magazine with enthusiasm when, in mid-January, the first issue of *Amazing Stories Quarterly* appeared on the newsstands. It cost fifty cents per copy, but that half dollar purchased a complete book-length novel (no idle phrase at this time) and almost again as many words of other fiction.

Jules Verne and H. G. Wells still took up a large percentage of the pages in *Amazing Stories* monthly—"Robur, the Conqueror", by Verne, concluded in the January issue, and its sequel, "The Master of the World", started in the February number; Wells' "When The Sleeper Wakes" was the big novel in the Winter *Quarterly*—but new stories by new authors were becoming more prominent.

The January issue opened with a novelet by an author new to science fiction magazines, although followers of *Weird Tales* had known Edmond Hamilton for two years. We have discussed "The Comet Doom" previously, and need add only that it inaugurated a type of story which would be seen again—and again and again, unfortunately. This was the mechanical formula plot, wherein the "science" was glib nonsense heaped on a modicum of fact. The sole interest, once the never-varied plot became familiar, lay in the manner in which the "doom" was worked out. What gave Hamilton's stories life, and makes for interesting reading even today, was the imaginative and fascinating details of alien cultures—something which few others who took up the formula later bothered with, and few editors demanded.

"THE MAN ON THE BENCH" by W. J. Campbell derives from Robert Louis Stevenson's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde". In the Campbell story, a certain Dr. Sexton has produced two serums, and tells his audience:

> "Gentlemen, these little bottles contain my secret, a formula never before dreamed of by man....I am the only person living who knows the formula....It has not been committed to paper; perhaps may never be, I may also state that in my opinion, no chemist could ever successfully analyze it."

Since only the doctor knows, and he won't tell, the author is relieved of any responsibility of speculating about what

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drugs, or combination of drugs, might possibly bring about the amazing effects the Sexton serum is supposed to have. Pointing out that there is "some good in the worst of us", the doctor asks why a man's moral characteristics cannot be changed. Consider, he says:

> "...Science has banished or reduced to a minimum a number of diseases of physical man, why cannot some of his moral attributes be changed? These, as the others, may be due to heredity, accident, or association... Finally, I may state that no person of his own free will, thus afflicted, ever overcomes these conditions. There must be an outside influence... I have at last succeeded in producing what I have chosen to call *Degeno* and *Elimino*. *Degeno* will bring out or magnify the predominating bad characteristics, and *Elimino* will remove them in a few minutes time."

All of which makes an interesting combination of sense and nonsense. Even in 1928 one might legitimately be suspicious of a serum or drug which "no chemist could possibly analyze", particularly when there is no mention of new elements or hitherto-unknown moleculecar combinations. This isn't science; it's fairy-tale magic.

HOWEVER, let's assume that Dr. Sexton is a superchemist, so far in advance of his time that no contemporary chemist is able to analyze his serum. He still doesn't know much of anything about free will. Free will is the freedom to *choose* between succumbing to or resisting the temptation to do that which the person recognizes as evil. Now even in 1928 it was realized that a person could be so afflicted by various neuroses that his behavior was not entirely free; even when he recognized an action about to be taken as evil or wrong, and did not want to peform it, he was unable to prevent himself from doing it. The ancients were aware of this, too; they called it "demonic possession". And it must be admitted that certain types of neuroses do seem to function like demons within the afflicted person. ("L. Ron Hubbard's "engrams", although sheer fantasy, do follow observed patterns of human behavior.)

Persons so afflicted cannot cure themselves; but they can

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THE CASE FOR EARTH

by Eric Frank Russell

illustrated by ORBAN

No one could have put the case better, and in less biased a manner... but no Earthman could deny the argument of the opposition!

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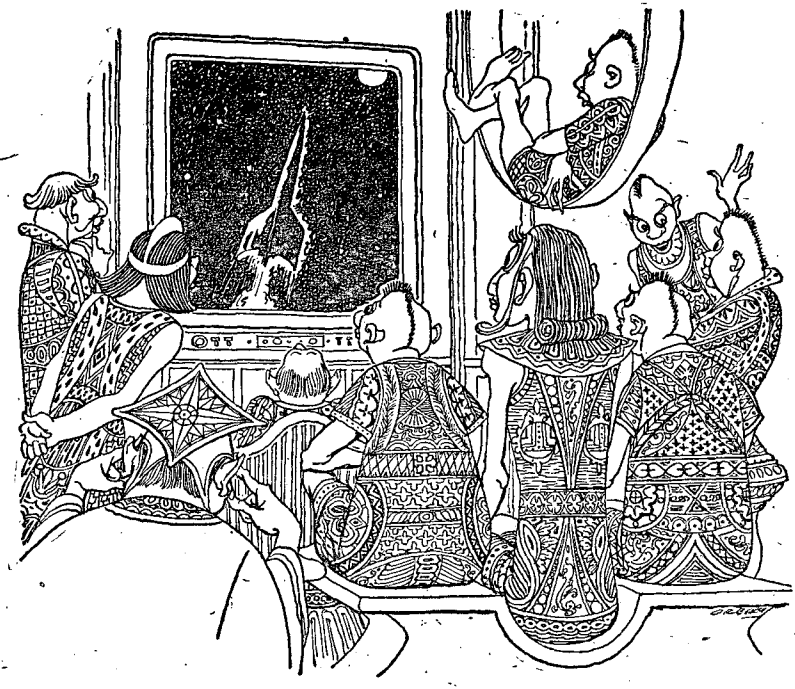

HE'D GONE two-thirds of the way when it happened. There was no reason to expect it. The Moon had been won and Venus conquered; ships lost and martyrs made; experience gained and lessons learned. Now Carlow was bulleting to Mars in a vessel vastly superior to the first Moon-boats. Everything that could be anticipated had been taken into account and guarded against; in theory the odds were proportionately greater in his favor.

But there are, and always will be, things that no man can foresee. Confiscation of the Moon, and mastery of Venus, represented humanity's expansion inward, toward the Sun. This, the first Mars-flight, was the initial thrust outward—away from the Sun, and more or less heading for the great concourse of stars. That made all the difference, an immensely significant dif-

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ference that no expert had taken into account, and no ingenuity could overcome.

So, at the two-thirds point he hit the blanking area and dived into it unaware. The engines continued to roar without falter or cease. Nothing was visible save the hazy mist of stars and the pink target slowly swelling ahead. No strange body made a blip upon his fluourescent screens; no other flame-trail was detected by his thermo-couples.

TWO MOONS had become visible to the naked eye before it dawned upon him that all was not well. First, Carlow noticed that the output meter of his pulse transmitter was registering zero, despite the fact that the apparatus seemed to be functioning. Back on Earth, they were depending on that constant emission to keep radio-track of a body far too small to be followed with telescopes. Without it, they lost him—unless he resorted to the vocal beam and used it long enough to enable them to take new bearings.

Hurriedly, he switched on the main transceiver, spoke through his larynx microphone. "Do you still get my beacon, Earth? Do you still get my beacon?"

He repeated it at least twenty times. In all probability, the answer would be unintelligible—a distorted muttering amid a mess of static. But any response at all would serve to show that he had been heard. He strained at his ear-plugs and picked up nothing, not a sound, a voice, a murmur. Not even band-noise, backwash or the faint hiss of solar energy.

"Carlow calling! Carlow calling! Do you hear me, Earth? How is my beacon? Come in, Earth, and say whether you are getting my beacon!"

No reply.

On this transmitter, too, the output needle should have waggled in sympathy with the varying amplitude of his voice. It did not stir by a hairbreadth. He checked feed-cables and found nothing wrong. Power was pouring in, none squirting out. There was a transistor-tester among his numerous servicing instruments but how could he use that? One cannot control a racing vessel while partially dismantling and repairing a jigsaw puzzle of radio components. The tester was strictly for use when landed, and not before.

BY THE LOOKS of it, he was going to skid through the red dirt of Mars while those who had sent him were mourning his end. To their minds, sudden silence could mean only one thing: disaster, born of causes unknown.

Soon he was going to experience a major triumph that

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they could not share, because the means of sharing had been denied them. The onus lay upon Carlow to restore communication immediately after landing. He would do his best, but he wasn't sanguine about it; he was a space-pilot rather than a radio expert. No man can be master of every conceivable skill.

Two more times he called, without slightest response; definitely the link to Earth was broken and had been broken for quite a while. He had no way of telling how long.

Further efforts were futile, because the landing now was too close at hand. He thundered across the orbits of Phobos and Deimos, with the vast face of Mars extending far beyond the capacity of the observation-port. No time to study the face; not a moment to spare for curious examination. It took all his strength, ability and single-minded concentration to bring the ship down without damage.

THE MARTIAN horizon swayed across the port as he swung the ship into a shrinking orbit around the planet. He took her round three times before velocity, angle of declination and nature of terrain were all just right. The vessel belly-skidded along a flatland that was not red but gray-green, with a thick carpet of lichens. The tail-end roar ceased for the first time in many, many days. This was it, the hour of victory—the long step toward the Asteroid Belt, the Outer Planets, another solar system, an endless, uncountable multitude of worlds.

Yet, Carlow did not howl with the glory of it, jump around, wave flags, sing songs; he lounged in his seat, sweating and exhausted. Now was the moment that would inscribe his name in history books in letters of gold; but, like all such moments, it proved strangely matter-of-fact, humdrum, lacking in great thrill. The reaction, of course, following a long period of intense nervous strain. The aftermath.

A few minutes crawled by before he recovered and stood up for a better look through the port. With sleepy-eyed lack of comprehension, he gazed at a dark circle across the lichens, the shadow of something huge and round standing alongside his ship.

His ears were equally reluctant to register when they heard an authoritative hammering upon the airlock door.

THE CONTROL-CABIN'S ports permitted a field of view covering a fraction less than one-eighty degrees. There were no other vantage points from which to look around, no side-ports, no vision possible from the tail.

He could stand by the instrument-board and survey a

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great sweep of alien territory that included nothing alongside or behind the ship. To see the rest, Carlow must blow the steering-jets lengthily and with enough power to edge the vessel around, wasting precious fuel and risking serious damage to the armor-plate shell. Seven-hundred tons grinding through an arc of ninety degrees would be more than enough to tear the belly-skids from the body.

Alternatively, he could go out through the airlock and take a look in person. He'd intended to do that very soon. If all had gone as planned he'd have donned a closed-circuit oxygen mask, taken a color-plate camera with him, set the instrument on its tripod and made a record of himself posing by the ship. The picture of the year, if not of the century.

But all had not gone as planned; the veteran advisers of Lunar and Venusian expeditions had no cause to expect what was taking place right now. They had provided instructions and advice, food, water, drugs, oxygen, signalling apparatus, instruments, weapons—every possible scientific contribution toward survival and success.

The one thing not provided was a safe way of answering the door when somebody—or some thing—knocks.

WHAT'S the answer to that? There are two, and only two. Open the door, and take a chance; or stay in and sit tight, perhaps forever.

Knock, knock!

Could it be a wind-stirred branch belonging to an adjacent tree? Not likely; he had seen no tree when skidding across the lichens. There wasn't a tree in sight from here to the horizon. Nothing but the gray-green sward and, far away on the skyline, a huge, ragged outcrop of red rock.

What else? Metallic pebbles leaping into the ship's magnetic field? No, the rapping was too deliberate and methodical for that. It sounded exactly like the summons of an imperative hand—in a vast desert where there was no hand.

Knock, knock!

The round shadow remained upon the lichens without moving or changing form. No other shadows extruded from its rim; nothing stirred on the landscape, nothing winged through thin air, no bizarre figure advanced over the skyline. Mars was a dead world exactly as astronomers had declared.

Knock, knock!

Carlow could not stand it any longer. The risks involved in getting here were more numerous and deadly than the danger of opening the door to an unknown caller. He had survived the former; surely he could meet and beat the latter. Nothing ven-

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tured, nothing gained. He who hesitates is lost. And so on.

ANALYTICAL instruments told Carlow that he'd need a mask, at least temporarily. Sometime he could do without it. One can become accustomed to rarified atmosphere, endure it without artificial aid, providing activity is not too strenuous. Men had discovered that fact atop Everest, many centuries ago. But for the time being he must use a mask.

Fastening one over his face, he checked its tank and supply hose. The feed-valve went *click-click* as he breathed. He took a pair of snouty, blued-steel guns from a drawer, shoved one into a side holster, and gripped the other in his right hand. Then he got down on all fours and crawled through the short tunnel leading into the airlock.

The inner door closed with a sigh. He broke the seal of the outer door, and heard Earth-air hiss as it joined that of Mars. It sounded like an angry serpent; whoever had been knocking should take that as a warning and stand clear.

He stationed himself strategically behind the door, gun held ready, as the door swung inward on heavy hinges. It opened full width, letting sunlight pour into the chamber. Nothing entered with it.

Bending, he took a swift look at the airlock rim. All that he could see was the top of a metal ladder propped against it. A ladder? Who the deuce could produce a ladder at a moment's notice and position it in readiness? There was something dreamlike about this, in fact nightmarish.

Stepping boldly into the rim he stared out, saw the man waiting at the bottom of the ladder.

IT WAS anti-climax with a vengeance. A mere man—a plain, ordinary man who looked as if he might be the corner grocer in his Sunday best. The man gazed up a slightly officious air, while the Earthling looked down in open stupefaction.

There was compensatory startlement in what stood behind the man, the thing that had cast its shadow like a menacing promise of coming events. A great silvery globe of diameter twice the length of the Earth-ship—a monster metal ball, with copper-colored rings protruding from its surface in symmetrical array.

The first thought that whirled through Carlow's mind was a natural product of the environment in which he had developed. "Some other nation had beaten us to it. We've made it too late."

Further speculation was halted when the man down below said pointedly and in per-

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fect English, "Why the gun?"

Carlow eyed the weapon as it sat in his hand and answered confusedly, "Why not?"

"Guns create guns," said the other. "And shooters get shot." He made a gesture. "Well you've come all the way here. Are you satisfied merely to stare at it from up there? Don't you want to stand on a new world?"

"Obviously I won't be the first. I am disappointed."

"So are we," said the man. "And likely to remain so for some centuries to come."

"What d'you mean? Having got here ahead of me you should be overjoyed."

"That is one viewpoint. There are others."

FIRMING his lips, and absorbing oxygen through his nostrils, Carlow mulled that remark over, then said, "I can think up a reason why you knocked for a neighborly chitchat."

"What is that?"

"Your ship is out of action and unable to return; the arrival of mine is a gift from the gods."

"Yours won't get back," said the man. "Never."

"It will."

"Sorry," the man persisted with strange self-confidence. "But you are mistaken."

"I don't think so. Stick around and watch me take off."

With that he pointed his gun at the other and started backing into the lock, his left hand stretching to close the door.

The man on the ground made a brief signal to the great metal globe. Carlow shot out of the lock, drawn by a dozen irresistible pulls. The gun was torn from his hand as he dived, his second weapon was ripped from its holster. His arm was lugged forward as his wristwatch tore itself loose; all the buttons leaped from his uniform jacket.

HE LANDED flat on a thick cushion of lichens, gasped for breath, and picked himself up. A ragged hole showed in the left of his pants where a small bunch of keys had taken the shortest route out of his pocket. It wasn't until he came erect that he realized that his mask had vanished along with the rest.

Carlow's opponent was facing him, tendering the mask with one hand while holding a purloined gun in the other. He took the mask, fitted it on. Its tank was dented, one of the straps broken, but it was wearable and still functioning. He drew oxygen thankfully.

"You won't need that thing in due time," assured the other, watching him.

Carlow glowered and said nothing.

"Unfortunately, though, I need this." He gestured with the gun. "I have to deal with

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you in the only manner your kind understands, namely, with a weapon. Get walking."

"Where?"

"Round to the other side of our ship. You'll find a gangway. March up it."

"You can go to hell," said Carlow.

"Courage and stubbornness are not the same things," remarked the man, speaking as one would to a small child. "Neither is abuse an effective argument."

"Soul of wisdom, aren't you?"

"I pretend to nothing." The other smiled as if at a secret thought, added, "You may call me Harry; one name is as good as another on any world." He waved the gun again. "You can proceed on your own feet or be carried. Suit yourself."

THERE WASN'T much choice about it. The momentary magnetic field that had robbed Carlow of all susceptible metal, in response to a signal, proved that there were others in the metal sphere—perhaps a dozen, perhaps twenty or more. At any rate, enough of them to cope with a solitary mule.

With bad grace Carlow walked as told; the man named Harry—if that was his true name—followed with weapon in hand. Carlow kept his thoughts to himself, and they were plenty. What damage had been done inside his own vessel by sudden immersion in so powerful a field? What critical instruments had been put out of action for keeps?

"Yours won't get back," the other had said. *"Never."*

Supposing it didn't, what then? Was all hope lost? Carlow did not think so. Despite intense nationalistic rivalries, Earth was a world considerably shrunken by ultrafast transport systems and vast communications networks. It was well-nigh impossible for any nation-sized group to retain a major secret longer than twelve months.

Over there, across the void, three thousand millions were living cheek by jowl, with rumors spreading fast among them, information circulating openly or surreptitiously at top speed. And there was no place to hide—for any lengthy period—anything so large and highly technical as a space-vessel far ahead of its time.

MERE POSSESSION of only one such ship implied the existence of an advanced technology, backed by formidable industrial resources. Once upon a time, in the long, long ago, a huge complex of factories and laboratories had been needed to produce the first supersonic rocket. Today, with a thing like this globe in plain view, the facilities behind it could be no smaller. It wouldn't take Earth long to learn the

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source of this space-conquering tool.

Right now, Carlow couldn't hazard a simple guess at who had reached Mars first and was acting tough about the holding of it. He probed at the puzzle by trying to determine the nationality or racial characteristics of this fellow Harry. It defeated him. Harry was of no readily identifiable type; his speech was devoid of accent, and noteworthy only for being stiltedly correct.

"Up there," ordered Harry as they reached the gangway.

Obediently walking up, Carlow entered a large airlock, stood side-by-side with his captor while the outer door closed, the inner one opened. He removed his mask, let it dangle in one hand. A nudge with the gun sent him into a long metal passage.

It was here that he halted, involuntarily paralysed by sight of one of the crew.

THE THING strolled casually from a door on the right, crossed the passage, entered a door on the left. It did not so much as glance at Carlow. It couldn't, because it had no eyes.

It was four feet high, broad, with flexible legs, and thin, rubbery arms terminating in digits that had the sinuosity of snakes. There were two breathing holes and a wide mouth in its green and scaly face; a feathery antenna protruded from its hairless head. It wore clothes of outlandish cut and sported some kind of insignia on the shoulders of its jacket.

Gazing through the door at this departing vision, Carlow ejaculated, "What's *that?*"

"A Hythian," said Harry. He prodded with the gun. "Keep going; you'll see more types before you're through. And in due time, you'll get used to them."

Harry was right. Around the corner, another and completely different creature side-stepped into a doorway to let them pass. This one was tall, gray, and skeletal. Its brilliant yellow eyes surveyed the prisoner with no surprise, no especial interest.

Farther along, they encountered two more as different again. One was a quadruped, with tiny hoofs like a gazelle's; it clattered past with open unconcern, followed by a crawling thing that seemed all eyes and tail.

"In here," Harry ordered, pushing a door open.

ENTERING, Carlow stared around the tiny cabin; he hardly heard the door close and lock as Harry departed. There was no port through which to examine surroundings. A folding seat lay against one wall; pulling it out, Carlow rested on it as he strove to halt the mad whirlings of his mind.

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His guess at a disabled first-comer obviously had been a stupid one, made in the confusion of the moment. The great globe had not been there when he'd landed; otherwise he could not have failed to see it. Therefore it must have arrived after him, within a few seconds. Such promptness suggested that it had followed him down from some point of ambush within the star-spangled darkness.

Equally as mistaken was his theory of Earth-origin. Conceivably, some nation could produce a vessel like this one; but from nowhere in the wide, wide world could it dig up such a crew. So whence had the big sphere come? What was its origin? The question baffled Carlow.

He was still battling this problem when an upward surge told him that the vessel was lifting; then it shifted to a sidewide motion. Acceleration was wonderfully smooth, with no thunder of rockets; no vibration through the shell; nothing but a low, almost-unhearable hum. It did not last long. After forty minutes he felt the sensation of descent, the slight bump of ground-contact.

Gravitational pull remained the same as before. That told him the ship had not soared to the nearer moon. They were still on Mars.

NOTHING happened for another hour, during which he mooched irefully around the cabin, took an emergency ration from his pocket, and ate it without tasting it. He tried concocting futile plans for escape, most of them violent and bloody. But deep inside himself he knew there was no escape.

Eventually the door opened and Harry entered. "No gun this time," he said. "The need for one no longer exists. We have thrown your weapons away." He measured Carlow with sharp gray eyes. "Don't let that fact tempt you to try anything rash; it will serve only to annoy us."

"Aren't *I* entitled to be annoyed?" demanded Carlow.

"No."

"Why not?"

"The question of your rights has yet to be settled. That will be done with the minimum of delay." His expression softened as he went on, "I regret that you have not been given a meal but you may have one now, if you wish."

"I'm not hungry. I could do with a drink, though."

"A stimulant?"

"Preferably."

Harry brought one. It looked like ginger pop, tasted like a mixture of pear-juice and old brandy. Carlow drank it, said, "Hah!" and felt a bit better.

"This way," ordered Harry.

He led the other along the corridor to the gangway. No-

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body passed them on the way. The huge vessel seemed empty, devoid of any other living soul.

Carlow toyed with the notion of jumping his guard while the going was good. It was a strong temptation, but he resisted it, deciding to bide his time. A better opportunity might arise later; and he wasn't dead, yet.

Outside, the gangway pointed toward a heavy metal door set in the face of a red rock wall. Together they marched through the doorway, along a wide, smoothly cut passage penetrating deep into the cliff. They reached a large, oval-shaped room with semi-circular tiers of seats rising at one end.

That was where Carlow got the willies again. The seats held an audience the like of which no Earth-born eyes had seen before.

PERMITTING himself to be led to a cushioned bench placed in the middle of the room, Carlow sat and stared dazedly at the assembly. His concentration was such that he was only dimly aware of Harry taking a seat beside him.

There were thirty-eight of them over there. He counted to make sure: Yes, thirty-eight; and no two of them alike. Most had eyes, but a few had not. Most had arms and legs, but some had other things. Only a couple of them verged on the humanlike. One of these had a neckless head fixed rigidly to his shoulders; the other was the size of a marmoset.

They ran the gamut of size, shape and color; they surpassed anything in his wildest dreams. And they sat there silently, surveying him with judicial calmness.

Harry leaned across and whispered, "Take it easy. I'm official interpreter. I'll tell you what is going on. Don't interrupt—it will do you no good whatever."

THE CENTER figure in the front row stood up, pressed a stud; a gonglike note sounded from a metal hemisphere set in the wall. Opening a thin, purple-lipped mouth, he spoke in sibilants resembling a wavering hiss. Harry translated in low tones.

"Friends, again we have to determine right of entry with formality according to law. An example of the lifeform concerned sits before you now. Being of the same shape and form, and familiar with the subject's language, our brother of the Sirian group will interpret these proceedings for the subject's benefit."

"What the hell is all this?" growled Carlow, fidgeting.

"Hush!" warned Harry. "You'll find out. Be patient."

"Damn it, do I have to squat here like a felon, while..."

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"Shut up! Curses and emotion are regarded as symptoms of irresponsible childishness; the least you can do is behave like an adult."

Carlow subsided, scowling. The speaker continued, "I call upon our brother of the Rigellian group to state the case in favor."

He—or it—sat down. Another stood up, a somewhat reptilian creature holding a wad of papers in a very humanlike hand. The way he cleared his throat before beginning was also human.

THIS ONE launched forthwith into a eulogy on the men of Earth. He did not color it, distort it, or lard it with mere opinions; he confined himself solely to facts, all of them flattering. He said that during the last two hundred Earth-orbits, Earthlings had climbed from progress stage eleven to progress stage seven. He spoke warmly of their many virtues—such as care for the aged and the sick; love of lesser animals; pity; self-sacrifice, and so-forth. It took him a full hour to get through his speech which, in its purely factual way, was an able performance.

Finally he resumed his seat and the first speaker arose. "I call upon our brother of the Centaurian twin worlds to state the case in disfavor."

Another creature stood up, tall, chameleon-eyed. For some reason best known to himself, he was wearing plastic filters in his nostrils. He had no papers, no hands with which to hold any. In a voice near the top of the audio-band he uttered a few words with an air of finality, resumed his seat. Harry did not bother to translate what had been said.

AGAIN THE first speaker came up. "Friends, you have heard summaries of the cases for and against. Is entry permitted?"

A unanimous, "No!"

"That is the decision of the associated species," he said. "Let the records be shipped to the central co-ordinating board as evidence that the law has been observed." His attention shifted to Harry. "Inform the subject that this verdict may be reversed when justification is found in the future."

Harry repeated it to Carlow, added philosophically, "That's that!" then conducted him back to the globe-ship and the cabin.

"What does all that business mean?" demanded Carlow.

"It means the time isn't yet; Earthmen are banned from free space."

"How are you going to stop them, eh? It won't be easy, I can tell you that!"

Smiling, Harry said, "We'll process your ship and let it crash upon Earth. The time,

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place, and direction of fall will show that it met disaster, drifted sunward, and was pulled into Earth's gravitational field. What we have done to the ship will baffle and alarm your scientists. They'll require many years to evolve a theory to account for it, more years in which to devise a hoped-for cure. They won't send another vessel until they have solved the problem—or think they've solved it."

"What about me?"

"IF WE were of your own kind," Harry told him, "We would deal with you swiftly and effectively. We'd take you out upon the sands, give you a minute for prayer, and put a bullet through your brain."

"Why should you? I've done you no harm."

"Very true," Harry agreed. "That's how we see it, too. Therefore you will be transferred to a nice, lush world which we have reserved for those who know too much—those whom we would not kill, but who must be kept out of harm's way. Your life will be idyllic—but to Earth you will be dead."

Sitting on the edge of the bunk, Carlow thought it over. He cared little for his own predicament. All space-pilots are men ready and willing to face the worst, come what may; they are callous with regard to themselves. But this arbitrary condemnation of Earth's three thousand millions was something else. The more he thought of it the more it riled him.

"That lanky nightmare said something about us," he reminded. "What was it?"

"I'd rather not tell you."

"Come on, out with it. Surely I have a right to know. If it's undeserved criticism, why can't I answer it? They didn't give me that chance, did they? Do you call that a fair trial?"

"He made a statement that we can confirm and you cannot deny."

"Well, what was it?" Carlow insisted.

Looking uncomfortable, Harry said, "He stated that yours is the only known life-form that systematically slaughters its own young."

Registering bitterness, Carlow snapped, "That doesn't make dogs of us. Even if we haven't learned to keep the peace, we are smart and tough and we keep going. Man's a rover, see?"

"Down, rover, down!" said Harry.

He went out, closed the door. The click of its lock sounded like the crack of doom.

Within an hour the ship lifted, taking yet another undesirable specimen to a planetary heaven that was also a penal colony.

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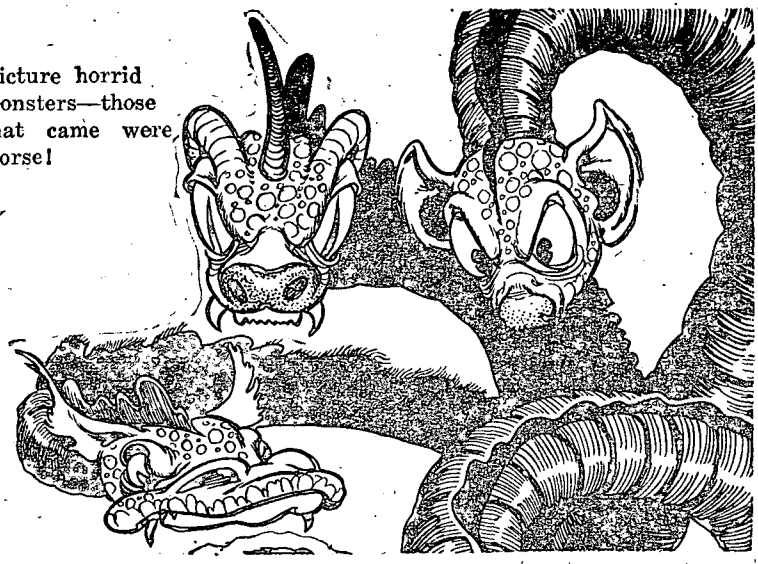

Picture horrid monsters—those that came were worse!

the zoet space

by Earl Goodale

My invention was successful beyond the dreams of more things than I suspected.

THE GLOBAL STORAGE COMPANY—"You Name It, We Store It"— was the last name on my list. I had started, hopefully and timidly, with the smaller outfits and had worked on up through the larger and wealthier companies. I laboriously punched out a query tape, fed it into the receptionist and waited for an answer—even Global couldn't afford one of the new voice-translator receptionists. The answer was discouragingly similiar to those I had received at World-Wide and Transworld and all the rest: "Your idea has been evaluated and cannot be used at this time by our company. We regret it is impossible to arrange an interview with an executive. Thank you for your interest in our company."

So I stamped away from the

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great green slab that housed Global's central offices and as I went I mentally multiplied their claimed cube-miles of storage space by one hundred. The computation was simple, the result fabulous. My invention would do this for them, it would give them a hundred times more space than they had now, and at a trifling cost. Small wonder that I was irritated at being baulked by a robot receptionist. But I knew why: everyone said that the companies all worked together, and a common man didn't have a chance. Of course I couldn't talk to one of their executives, chances were that they were all out playing marbut—grown men trying to maneuver a tetrahedron into a time slot!

BUT WE ZOETS are not a brooding, worrying family—however low in the ridiculous class structure of Karn we may be—and before I had gone many miles on the sibilant walkies the problem had simplified itself. Then I could feel the solution close as I manually walked that last short and featureless block. I beat down the last wall catchie with its hypnotic suggestion to buy Itsy Bitsy Kitsies by adding a splendidly obscene couplet; and then as I lifted to my kubicle, the complete solution of my problem came to me.

Do the makers of zigs or kaims run around trying to sell them to customers? No, they merely use advertising in the form of wall catchies or through the feelie networks. They saturate the customers' eyes; they flood the air with suggestive sounds, and they just wait for the customer to buy their product. There was my answer: I had to advertise, publicize, and my customers would come to me; and I wouldn't have to use the semi-legal hypnotic techniques, either. It was simple. Details were—naturally—harder than the principle involved. How did one advertise if one had no professional standing, or corporative credit?

BUT THE magicians were coming to town. They were coming with axe and saw, with magic carpet and witch-beast, with boiling tar and anti-gravity—all the traditional things that so thrill the young. Nowadays, humor is more important than awe, for science progresses quickly; but the old gadgets still retain their power of suggestion. Every day now, the news quickies were showing a new set of visitors arriving from this planet or another; and right there at the space port, one of the magicians would run through a trick or two. Great publicity—natural, unrehearsed stuff that made everyone aware the magicians were having their annual get-togethering.

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It wasn't too difficult getting a member of the entertainments committee to visit me. No magician can resist a guaranteed-new illusion. He was originally, I believe, a small blond man but he had grafted on extra height and taken the melanistic change.

"Well, let's see it Mr. Zoet," he said briskly.

I could see that he felt he was slumming. A Laborer, M-3, does not rate either a large kubicle or a beautiful one—especially a Laborer who does not chose to work more than three sits a week.

"This is it, sir," I said, "this locked box. I'd like you to examine it first."

He stalked about the box. I must admit it didn't look like much. It was just a squarish box, a bit larger than a feelie set, squatting on tubular legs and with a wire running to it, a switch to control the current completed the fixed equipment. I held the key and a long pole with a hooked end.

"Hum," he said, "homemade I see. Do you take things out of this or do you put them in—for the act, I mean?"

"Well, sir," I said, "I take things out—more things than what you would expect."

"Hunph, been done before, and better I daresay. Collapsible boxes, folding birds, contracted witch-beasts. Oh well, go on with your act."

He sat down on the couch and started his finger-dexterity exercises. Those professional men! Never waste a minute.

I UNLOCKED the lid and peered in. I snapped the control switch; the other space appeared, and with it my pile of books, my robe, the well-worn sandals, my cooking utensils and my cheap laboratory equipment. The gray walls seemed even more tenuous than before as they sloped away at the bottom and I wondered if my calculations showing 100 times more storage space than entrance dimensions were correct. I wished, but only momentarily, that I had the courage to descend into that dim air; but we Zoets have never been particularily brave —or foolish.

I started to haul the stuff out—the books, the clothes, and piled them beside my visitor on the couch. As the pile grew higher, he stopped testing each item and concentrated on watching me. He even forgot his place—somewhere around the fiftieth movement in his finger exercises—and he didn't bother to continue them.

"You say you've had no professional training, Mr. Zoet," he said, "but I've never seen a better illusion of a man reaching into a much deeper space than that box provides."

I smiled and started to hook stuff out with the pole. That did it. He clapped his hands happily. "Bravo, Mr.

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Zoet bravo! Why...that pole appears to be quite solid, and at least ten times the depth of the box, and yet it disappears almost completely. Might I see the pole please?"

When he handed it back to me I could see respect in his eyes and I felt within me the certainty that I would be a success.

THEN THEY appeared again—several elusive shadows that dissolved the moment I seemed to see them at the bottom of that grey space. They did appear to be a bit more solid this time, though, and I hurriedly brought up the rest of my equipment and furnishings. Then I snapped the switch and the box bottom reappeared, as solid and real as ever. Most impressive. I wished, but only slightly, that I had the technical training to understand the principle; it was embarrassing to invent something important and not know how or why it worked. All we Zoets, the whole family of us, have been blessed, however, with intuition; and what is mere mechanical knowledge compared with that? I felt, and therefore I knew, that my created space was simply an intersection with another world, or worlds. The shadows were only the inhabitants of that world.

"Well, that's it, sir," I said. "I could bring up more stuff you understand, but that's all the goods I possess."

But I had made my sale. Not for the first time I knew that the career computors had been wrong in assigning me to my lowly position. Laborer M-3, indeed!

I WAS, I freely admit, more than a little nervous when I gave my first show. The hall was only half-full, for there were many other attractions at the conference; but even so, those rows of faces were intimidating when I realized that all of them were real professionals. But my act was a success, a real buffalo as the pro's call it. The audience didn't get warmed up until I had the entire front of the stage covered with props: the portable feelie sets; the cartons of zigs (the local dealer paid me most handsomely for displaying his goods); and a score of household and sporting implements. The applause was slow in coming, but when it came it was a wave of clapping and shouting that had a peculiar effect on me—I felt light on my feet, sure of myself; I would even have put on an anti-gravity act for that perfect audience.

The bit of business at the end, when I sprayed the inside of the box with insect killer, even received applause, though there was really no point in it, so far as the crowd was concerned. And in fact there was no point in it, for the shadows merely moved back into the shifting mono-

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tone walls of space. A point of minor interest was that the shadows seemed to have a more definite shape now and seemed rather too large to be affected by insect killer.

For my next performance, the hall was full of enthusiastic magicians—what the pro's call a most host—and after another buffalo of a show, a feelie agent hinted he might have an opening for me on a local hookup. He, like the audience, was a bit puzzled by my blasting the interior of the box with a ray pistol at the conclusion of the act, but I was able to think up a gag to cover my action. I had to do something, of course, for the strange space shapes were getting bolder. The ray did not, strangely enough, dissolve them. They just scuttled about in their aimless fashion and then melted again into the shifting grey walls.

I WAS A BIT worried that the things might steal my props, so for my last performance I delayed filling the space—the Zoet Space as I now called it—until the last minute; and then I first blasted the space for some minutes with my ray pistol. The stagehands were most puzzled by this seemingly preposterous act.

Ah, that last performance! I can still hear that applause; somewhere, way back, a Zoet must have been a public performer, for the sight of the hall completely jammed with people, the sound of the applause, all affected my senses as no drink or drug ever had. I went wild, completely wild. I threw out the contents of the space box onto the stage in profusion; I made jokes; I danced with an armful of props, and I sang snatches of song. The applause grew and grew. They loved me. But then the space below was empty, there was nothing more to bring up. I could not stop the cheering drove me on—and when one of the shapes, now larger and clearer than I had ever seen, darted beneath me I hooked it and dragged it up. It was a strangely heavy thing but I strained away and the audience, sensing that I had a new surprise for them, grew respectfully s i l e n t. Then I lifted the beast—for it was something alive—out, and dropped it on the front of the stage.

The front ranks of the audience were appalled at the sight of the creature, but the rest of the crowd went mad with excitement and applause. I stepped to the front of the stage and bowed again and again. Finally I held up my hand for silence.

This was my moment. I had decided that just a simple, d i g n i f i e d announcement would do—a mere statement that this illusion was not an illusion but the first public demonstration of the Zoet Space. Ah, my customers

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would come running now—for this last performance was on the local feelie network.

THE AUDIENCE, strangely enough, did not quiet down, and some panic showed up in the front rows where people started running for the side exits. Some of them were pointing behind me and screaming. Then I heard the shouting behind me and as I turned I saw several stagehands running at my box which I had neglected to turn off. We Zoets—ever impractical!

Perhaps you are imagining horrid monsters coming out of the box. Well, what came was worse.

It was rather a dreadful sight to see that monster—this time a much larger beast—emerging from the box. In size and shape and form so much like us (though much denser in mass, of course) and yet so alien and menacing. I kept my head admirably, if I do say so myself, and I blasted the creature with my ray pistol set at maximum force. But the ray, which would have reduced any of us Karnians to quivering jelly had no effect on the monster—the Earthmonster as they are now called. When I saw the effect, or lack of effect, of my ray pistol I flung myself over the front of the stage and hurried out a side exit. I left the hall without any panic, though I was forced to step on and knock down several people less quick than myself.

THE REST of the story is soon told. Personally, it is a success story, though it does have sad aspects. My home planet was quickly overrun by the Earthmonsters. As I had surmised, they were quite unaffected by what our leaders had optimistically called the Ultimate Weapon. I followed the results of the struggle with considerable regret from Zura, the planet next to mine, for I had taken passage the same night the first Earthmonster had appeared. Since I had taken the precaution to sail under an assumed name, there was no unpleasantness when I landed on Zura.

More than that, with the money I had received in advanee for my show I was able to persuade a zig-addicted classification clerk to upgrade me to Warehouseman, G-4, and I was able to see the storage executives of my company in less than three months. They were most enthusiastic about my invention. Luckily, the invasion of my home planet had been quickly and mercifully carried out, and reports from there were only fragmentary.

Now I am Storage Executive, C-2, on Zola, the next planet to Zura. I left Zura—wisely as it now turns out—after reports were made of things appearing in our stor-

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age vaults. I fully expect, though, that on this planet or some other, the Zoet Space will not intersect that of the Earthmonsters, and then I shall be able to settle down and enjoy a high and well-merited position.

Readin' and Writhin'

FADS & FALLACIES IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE by Martin Gardner; 363 pages (including appendix, notes, and index of names); Dover, 1957; $1.50.

This is something more than just a re-titled soft-cover reprint of *"In The Name of Science:"* Now we have an added chapter, and 31 pages of appendix and notes—considerable material not to be found in the original hard-cover edition. And for once a publisher's front-cover blurbs are accurate and to the point: "The curious theories of modern pseudoscientists and the strange, alarming cults that surround them. A study in human gullibility." Among the subjects covered are Flying Saucers, Alfred Korzybski, Atlantis, Bridey Murphey (the subject of the added chapter), Eccentric Sexual Theories, Dr. W. H. Bates (Sight without glasses—or better still, as one wit put it, sight without eyeballs.); Wilhelm Reich, L. Ron Hubbard, Psionics Machines (the appendix looks into this); hollow Earth theories; Great Pyramid cranks; Food faddists, and numerous others.

The author notes that the first edition brought forth a lot of wrathful letters, but in most instances the injured reader complained only about one particular chapter or section, while heartily approving the rest. Disciples of Wilhelm Reich, for example, were outraged at being put in the same category as the Dianetics addicts, even though they appreciated Gardner's analysis of Hubbard's magic; the Hubbard fans were pleased to see Reich's orgonometry exposed, but bristled at the comment on Dianetics and Scientology, etc; while the General Semanticists seem to have generally approved all but the chapter on Korzybski.

Your reviewer might add that while he was interested by quite a bit of both Reich and Korzybski (some of it doubtful, according to Gardner) he was impressed, in reading the first edition, by the fairness of the chapters on both of these men. And he has heard that the late Count Alfred Korzybski read the chapter on General Semantics and commented that it was fair, too—but this may just be a rumor. (It's the sort of thing that ought to be true.)

It isn't too comfortable, either, to note how often and loudly science-fictionists have shown gullibility far beyond the line of duty—but the facts are there, and Gardner merely notes them. He gives a science fiction fan (Dr. Thomas Gardner) credit, though, for the best discussion of the Shaver imbecilities. And it is true that individual fans have resisted such vagaries as Dianetics, Shaverism, Flying Saucers, Psionic Machines, etc., but those who went the whole hog were both more numerous and vocal.

The book, let me add, is entirely fascinating and readable from beginning to end; it was a bargain at hard-cover prices—at $1.50 (with additional material), you can't beat it.

—JAY TYLER

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Novelet

the silver cube

by Mark Hellington

illustrated by EMSH

It appeared out of nowhere, in the depths of space in the *Servadac's* path. Then it floated there, motionless, seemingly lifeless—waiting for men to investigate...

ONE MOMENT there was nothing out there but the silent, glittering emptiness of starry space. The *Servadac* hurtled through immeasurable depths, flaming with its own light like some legendary dragon. Away and beyond the stars glittered. The ship was alone, and space was cold.

The next moment...

"Object ahead, Captain!"

"Stop the ship!"

Power flared into the Kampensmythe tubes and the *Senvadac* went inert; its velocity became zero without any object or person aboard being affected by the abrupt halt. The tubes died, and the ship floated in free fall.

The crew converged toward the ports to gaze out into space at the intruder.

"Where did *that* come from?"

"Not from home, you can bet!"

"Ambassadors from the stars—let's break out the

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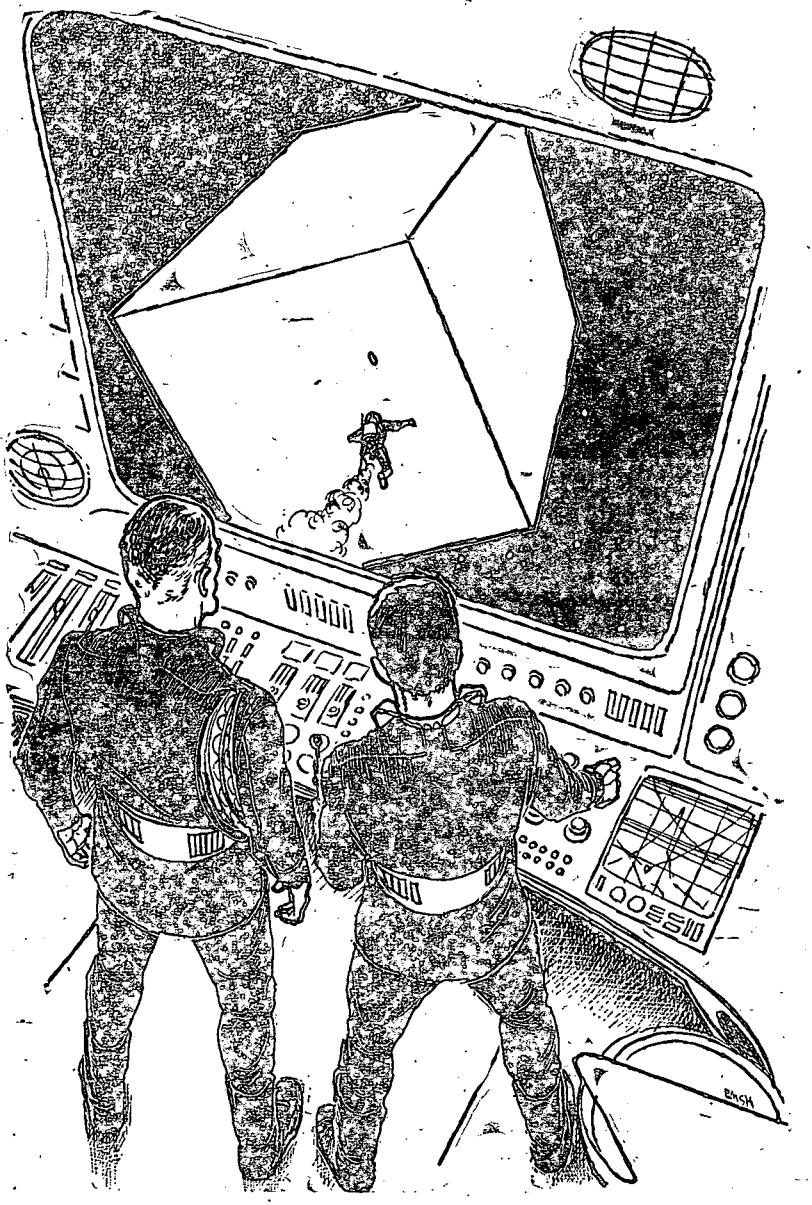

Jessup was drawing near the opening in the cube.

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dress uniforms and white bow ties!"

"Invaders, I say. Want to bet?"

"If they are, why bet? What chance to collect?"

"Think they're stronger than us? Old Terra can handle anything in the system."

"Sure...but that thing is not from Sol!"

The exclamations continued; the crew delighted with the break of routine, after five years of endless, uneventful scouting. But in his bridge, the captain pondered, surrounded by his staff.

"It certainly looks like an alien machine," said Weston, the chief engineer, looking through the thick crystal of the forward port.

THE OTHERS said nothing, and their silence was a confirmation.

"Any orders, skipper?"

Captain Aram Daniels frowned. "That thing wasn't there until ten minutes ago; Neil swears to that. The scanners should have detected it an hour ago. They didn't."

"How far is it?"

"About half a mile."

Somebody whistled in appreciation.

"You know what that means, of course," said Daniels. "Either its potential speed is practically instantaneous or...or it just materialized there out of nothing. In either case, it has to be something light years away from all the science we've got."

"I say blast it, just in case," said Second Officer Neil.

"We can't risk a hostile move. Why blast? It has been there for twenty minutes and hasn't attacked us yet. It's floating in free fall, as we are keeping the same distance from us. Conclusion: that thing is here on purpose. It is here for us."

He looked around. "Questions is: What are we supposed to do about it?"

THE QUESTION remained unanswered. Daniels waited a moment longer and then smiled wryly.

"I'm paid to make decisions that involve the life of five hundred people, and take the responsibility for the decisions I make. Very well. I want every gun aboard manned; I want a twenty-four hour watch. For the time being, we stay put. We wait; let them make the first move. Then, we'll decide. All heads of department must keep their phones in contact with this cabin. Check every strategic item aboard. See what we have, what we don't have."

He stared at his staff. "I've ordered a coded message to Station Ten. If possible, they'll relay it to the Moon, and they'll tell Earth. If possible!"

He stared through the porthole again. "This is all, gentlemen; to your posts, please."

The men withdrew. Aram

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Daniels remained seated at his metal desk, thoughtfully biting the nail of his right middlefinger.

Outside, the silver cube gleamed palely in distant sun and starlight, gleamed with a greenish but beautiful sheen, its surfaces smooth and untarnished, running into each other with flawless, mathematical finish. The silver cube floated and yet seemed still, maintaining the same distance from the *Servadac* that it had when first sighted. It kept its distance and waited.

THE SHIP waited also. From the portholes, through the radar scanners, by the guns, the crew watched tensely and waited, while the gleaming cube remained sharply sketched against its starry background.

Hours passed, and tension grew. Jokes became fewer, and finally stopped; frowning, worrying, the men were ready for instant action, for the first order, for the first alarm...and nothing came.

At the tenth hour, something happened on the silver cube. A round, dark hole gaped at the exact center of a previously even, continuous surface.

Instantly the phone in the skipper's cabin rang deafeningly. From five different directions men came running with the information. "A door opened on the alien, captain."

Daniels was already looking through the forward port.

"I know. Nothing come out, eh?"

Nothing did come out. The round door gaped on the nearest surface of the cube, and that was all.

"It's weird," said the captain.

"Any orders, sir?"

"Let's wait a little longer."

THE CREW was again excited, again in a good humor. Something had happened.

"Give it ten minutes and somebody will come out. Who takes me on it, two to one?"

"I'll take it!"

"A gorgeous gal is going to come out!"

"You read too much fiction, bud. More likely a thing waving a white flag."

"You guys take this too lightly," said a well-muscled, rugged mechanic who had spent the last five hours calmly cleaning and assembling a parabolic rifle. "What makes you think that thing is a door?"

"Looks like a door to me," said one. The others corroborated.

"It does," agreed the mechanic. "It also looks like lots of other things."

"Like for instance?"

"Like the barrel end of a gun. Like an opening for launching missiles. Like the end of this parabolic rifle."

There was an awkward silence.

"You trying to make us

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nervous, Hank?" asked someone.

The mechanic shrugged his shoulders. "No. Just trying to remind you that we don't know what's coming out. It may be a lifeboat with an ambassador. It may be a missile."

He got up, stretched his cramped muscles and came to the porthole. The greenish-silvery light reflected from the cube cast angular shadows on his square, solid face.

"If you ask me," he said, "that thing looks just like a die. And seems we've got the crap end of it!"

EVENTUALLY this observation made its way around the ship and came to Daniels' ears.

"What's the man's name?" he asked.

"Hank Jessup, sir. Mechanic first class."

"Bring him to me."

"Yes, sir."

"Hank, you're wanted in the bridge."

"Oh-oh."

"I didn't do anything!" said Hank.

"The captain only wants to talk to you, Jessup. He heard your joke about crap game. Hop along!"

"That ought to teach me to keep my big mouth shut," grumbled Jessup, letting go of his parabolic rifle.

"Good luck, Hank," called the others.

"You'll need it, boy."

THE CAPTAIN was still looking through the porthole when the ensign and the mechanic entered his cabin. He turned to study the man with thoughtful eyes. He had to raise his head to look into the other's face; he was a small man, and the mechanic was well above six feet tall.

"You Jessup?" asked Daniels.

"Yes, sir."

"You compared that cube to a die with its crap end to us?"

Hank licked his lips nervously. "Yes, sir."

"I wanted to tell you that I agree with you," said the captain.

The mechanic managed to conceal his relief from his face. Small men made him nervous; his captain made him nervous; and the fact that Daniels was small made him even more nervous. The captain went around him, as a farmer appraising a new cow, his keen eyes as needles in the mechanic's skin. Hank suffered the examination with an impassive face.

Finally, Daniels seemed satisfied. He went to the forward port and looked out, his back to the mechanic and the other men in the cabin, his hands behind his back.

"Jessup, that die has been out there for fifteen hours. Two hours ago, it opened that hole, and has been looking at us with it ever since. Not a blasted thing came out of it."

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THE CAPTAIN stopped and seemed expectant. Someone nudged the mechanic.

"Yes, sir," said Hank Jessup.

"I want a man to go there, and take a look at the thing."

"Yes, sir."

"I need a sensible man, with a head on his shoulders."

"Yes, sir."

"Would you volunteer, Jessup?"

"No, sir."

"I didn't expect you to," said Daniels. Was he smiling? "*I* wouldn't volunteer if I were in your boots."

"Yes, sir."

"Lots of others would volunteer, I'm sure."

"Yes, sir."

"But I want a man who *won't*, Jessup."

"Yes, sir."

"Suppose I order you to go, Jessup?"

"Yes," sighed Hank, "sir."

II

THE CUBE and the Servadac floated steadily, two metal insects facing and defying each other. The cube was cold, silent, unfathomable; but the ship hummed inside with many lives. When a porthole opened on the ship and a minuscule, spacesuited figure floated into the vacuum, the cube remained cold and aloof.

The cube grew against its background; it loomed formidable. Hank Jessup could feel the sweat trickling thick out of his pores—not running down, for there was no *down*, no *up*; only forward and backward—backward the ship, warm, friendly, watchful and anxious, forward the silver mass with a greenish sheen, staring at him with its empty, lidless eye. The cube stared darkly and unblinkingly at the pigmy who dared to approach it; it stared and waited.

"Jessup?"

"Jessup here, sir."

"This is the captain."

"Yes, sir."

"Any sign of life?"

"None, sir."

"You afraid, Jessup?"

"Yes, sir."

"Want to come back?"

"Might as well stick around a little longer, sir."

"That's the spirit. What's in that black hole?"

"Can't see a thing, sir. Am floating right in front of it."

"I know; we can see you. Can't you see anything at all?"

"No, sir. It's dark inside. No light at all."

"Use your headlight on it."

HANK JESSUP pressed down a lever inside his thick glove, and on the top of his round helmet a light shone forth. He directed the pencil of brightness towards the gaping mouth on the cube's surface. He thought he could see something loom far back beyond the opening: something that moved with a

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strange, vibratory motion, something that had no shape, a shadow. He strained his eyes; but it was gone.

He became aware of Daniels' voice speaking to him, an undertone of alarm in it.

"Sir?"

"What happened? Why did you go silent?"

"I thought I saw...something."

"What?"

"I don't know. A shape—a shadow. But I can't see it any more; it's gone. The thing looks empty now. My headlight can't reach the bottom."

"I'm sending two more men over, Jessup. Don't try to go in there alone."

The mechanic laughed inside his helmet. "Don't worry about that, sir. I'll stick around. No son of my mother is going into that opening alone."

And as soon as he said this, Hank Jessup gravitated, slowly at first, then fast, towards the opening; he was sucked in by some mysterious force, a pressure, what not; he passed through the circular opening; he was inside.

Clang!

IT HAD happened so fast, so unexpectedly, that when the mechanic remembered to yell, he was already inside the cube, dazed, breathless. The reverberation of the metallic clang still rung in his ears when he became simultaneously conscious of three things:

First, he was inside a cubic cell about ten cubic feet in volume.

Second, the cell was lighted, clear as day on Earth.

Third, the opening through which he had been drawn was closed. A formidable metal lock had covered it. This was undoubtedly the source of the noise he had heard.

"Jessup! What happened? Where are you? Confound you, man, I told you to wait! Jessup? Do you hear me?"

He could hear, all right. And as this fact penetrated his brain, it superimposed itself on all the impossible things that were happening. For he had been connected to the ship through the normal wire, that served also as safety cable; he was now inside the cube, hermetically locked from the outside by a forbidding door.

Yet, Daniels' voice kept coming through the wire. "Jessup, can you hear me? Answer me! Jessup!"

Hank looked around himself. The cell was bare, the walls shone with the same silvery gleam of the outside; but their sheen was dazzling with a light that pervaded them. The light came from no apparent source of illumination. It came from the walls. They were translucid. They were metallic to the sight, but they were translucid.

He kicked at one of them

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with his heavy boot. A metallic boom was transmitted to his ears through the air in his spacesuit.

At which he realized a fourth impossible thing: His feet were solid on the floor. This cell supported him with what amounted to normal Earth gravity—not the half-G provided by gyro in his own ship, but normal Earth gravity. He could feel the extra weight on his legs.

"HANK JESSUP! Jessup! Can you hear me?"

Hank decided to give up thinking as a bad job. Instead, he raised his gloved hands to touch the cable attached to his waist. He found it, turned, began to follow it to the locked opening, winding it on his left arm as he went. And as he reached the heavy metal lock he made his fifth discovery.

The cable went out through the metal.

Instinctively he pulled at it. He pulled it to the right, then to the left. It went with exactly the same facility as if it were passing through plain air.

"Jessup! Jessup!"

Hank stared unbelievingly at the wire. He moved it in a circle. He tugged at it. He let it drop. It dropped straight to the bottom of the lock; there, something stopped it, and the rest of it fell inside the cell, of the floor.

Hank crouched and tugged down at the part of the wire that had been stopped at the bottom of the lock. It resisted his pull.

He touched the bottom of the lock and found hard metal against his glove.

He got up again, stretched a trembling hand towards the exact center of the circular locker; for a second he hesitated, then touched it gingerly with his fingers.

HIS FINGERS went right through. And his wrist. And half his forearm. He pulled his arm back and stood looking at the solid metal, the metal that had clanged audibly less than a minute before. He touched it again, and found nothing. His hand went through.

Hank inhaled deeply, held his breath, closed his eyes, and lunged forward to the lock. He jumped, head first.

As he jumped, a crystalline sound, musical as the vibration of delicate silver bells, reached his ears.

"Jessup! *There* he is! Jessup, are you all right?"

Hank opened his eyes. He was floating in the vacuum, and above and below him stretched the yawning abyss of endless stars.

In front of him, was his ship; behind him, loomed the silvery cube, the circular opening black and empty staring at him from the cube's face.

"Jessup, you all right?"

"Be damned if I know,"

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said the mechanic, more to himself than to the other.

"What's that?"

"I'm all right, sir; nothing happened."

"I told you to wait, man!"

"I'm sorry, sir. Something pulled me in."

"What do you mean, *something?*"

"I don't know. A force. Some energy field, I guess. And then the door shut."

"What?"

"The door shut with me inside, sir."

Pause.

"What door, Jessup?"

"I mean the outer lock, sir."

A LONGER pause. "That lock has been open all the time, Jessup. We saw you go in, and waited for you to come out. Are you sure you're all right?"

The mechanic looked at the gaping hole, black and empty and featureless. He puckered his lips. "I guess it figures," he muttered.

"Jessup?"

"Sir?"

"Stand and wait; this is an order. I'm sending Dr. Weston and Lieutenant Neil over. You wait until they get there."

"Yes, sir."

The cube loomed before him, cold and aloof. But the quality of this aloofness had changed subtly. First, it had been menacing; now, curiously, it was inviting. It stood there, open, its black eye on the pigmy before it, and seemed to transmit a challenge. Hank swore softly.

"I'll go back in, don't you worry," he whispered.

The cube seemed to cock a mocking eye at him.

With a swift kick of his leg, the mechanic turned toward the *Servadac* again. Two other diminutive figures had just left the airlock and were drifting towards him.

As he looked at them, he sensed a *presence* behind him.

HE KICKED again and turned back quickly. The interior of the open lock was utter darkness; and yet, something was moving inside that darkness. He thought he got a glimpse of a flutter, a disturbance in the shadows. He strained his eyes; it was gone.

The two men were by his side now, coming to a halt through their braking belt-rockets. Immediately they connected their helmets with his.

"You all right?" asked the chief engineer.

"Yes, Dr. Weston."

"What's this story of a door closing on you?"

"A door did close on me, sir."

"We didn't see it."

"I saw it, sir."

"Craziest thing," said Weston. "I wonder where it comes from. I don't like it. I don't feel like going inside."

Captain Daniels' voice sounded inside their helmets. "What's that, Weston? If

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Jessup could go in alone, I see no reason why the three of you can't do the same."

"Yes, *sir*!"

"Guess we're going in," muttered Neil.

Hank nodded his head inside his helmet. "Oh, yes! I've got an account to settle with whatever is in there."

Before the others could move, he bent forward, grasped their shoulders to gather momentum, and propelled himself towards the lock.

AS HE entered it, again the tinkling of silvery bells sounded in his ears.

The cubic cell was lighted as before, empty as before, but there were two changes: The outer lock remained open; he could see his ship, could see the two men coming back towards him from the distance where he had pushed them to move himself.

And in the wall facing him, a new lock was open where there had been none, dark and empty and waiting.

The other two crossed the outer lock, dropped on their feet behind him, and looked around.

"Amazing," said Weston, touching the other two's shoulders. "Artificial gravity!"

"Old stuff," muttered Neil.

"Without force fields? We came in as into a house! What makes them shine, I wonder?"

"They're probably hollow glass or plastic containing fluorescent material."

"They may be glass," said Hank, "but they sound and feel like steel, sir. Kick them."

Neil kicked them. "Ouch!"

Weston laughed. "I wonder what that lock is for."

"Come into my parlor, said the spider."

The chief engineer shuddered. "Light it up with your headlamp, Jessup."

THE MECHANIC directed the beam on his helmet towards the lock.

Weston gasped. "Why, it...it doesn't go in! The light doesn't go in! Ever seen anything like that, Neil?"

"In a lab, once. Physics class. It took a huge apparatus to produce the effect."

"I guess we're supposed not to peek," said Weston.

"No," said Hank, shaking his head. "They want us to go inside without knowing what to expect."

The two men turned their heads and stared at him through the transparent plastic of their visors. "What do you mean? What—who are you talking about?"

"I don't know," said the mechanic. "But that's what they want. I know; I can feel it."

"A hunch, eh? Sometimes they come out good," said Weston. He looked at the door. "They are playing hide and seek, then. Might as well go in."

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He opened his shoulder holster and held his subsonic gun in his gloved left hand.

"Come on," he said, and crossed the lock. The other two followed.

Clang!

III

THE THREE MEN jumped and turned around. The lights were on—the walls shining. And the lock through which they had come had just vanised.

Weston jumped to the wall and ran anxious fingers over it. The wall was smooth, as if there had never been an opening on it.

Hank Jessup picked up his wire. This time the tip had been cut clean off; Captain Daniels would be having a fit in a minute.

A hand nudged Jessup's shoulder. He turned, and saw Neil pointing at the opposite wall.

There was a circle painted on the wall, or ingrained in it—a red circle about the same size of the lock they had just passed. The surface of the wall within the circle was full of curious indentations.

Scattered on the floor in front of the circle were several pieces of the same silvery metal that composed the walls and, apparently the whole cube.

Weston joined them in looking, and again the three men touched each other to talk. "You know what I think? I think we've been trapped."

"A brilliant deduction," said Neil sarcastically. "What do we do next?"

THE MECHANIC was looking at the pieces of glittering metal on the floor. He pointed at them with one of his feet. "I may be crazy, but doesn't the shape of those things fit the notches on that wall?"

"It looks so," said Neil.

"Look, there's a five-pointed star. And there is one on the wall."

"Fellows," said the chief engineer, "perhaps I've gone off my rocker, but do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"I think we're being tested."

Hank Jessup nodded his head in silence. He had reached the same conclusion almost at once.

"What do you mean, *tested*?" asked Neil.

"Like psy tests. Don't you remember? When you're supposed to fit pegs and squares in their holes and things like that?"

"You mean an I.Q. test?"

"Yes!"

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me that some alien form of life is testing *us* to see how clever we are?"

"Or how stupid."

"No!"

"It looks like it, doesn't it? Look, suppose we pick up

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those pieces on the floor and fill the holes and see what happens?"

"I sure would like to get my hands on whoever rigged this setup!" exclaimed Neil. "Testing us! Why, the..."

"We're losing time." Hank went forward and started picking up the pieces and trying them on the indentations. Weston came to help him, and presently Neil joined them.

THE PIECES fitted, but it wasn't so easy to fit them as at first they had thought. Some of them were cut out in straight, simple geometrical patterns, but others were eccentrically disposed, or without symmetry; still others were composed of patterns of curves difficult to identify and adjust. However, before fifteen minutes were passed, Weston fitted the last piece on the wall.

Immediately the wall disappeared within the boundary of the red circle, and a new lock was before them. This time, however, it was lighted.

"What was that?" asked the chief engineer, touching the others. "Did you hear that tinkling?"

"Like silver bells?" asked Neil.

"Funny you should call them *silver* bells," said Hank. "The same idea occurred to me; I've heard it before. You know what I think it is? I think it's a sign that we've succeeded in the test."

"It may be," said Weston. "As for the silver idea, it is naturally suggested by the color of this crazy ship. I... hey! Look behind us!"

The others turned. The lock had disappeared, but now it was back; through it they could see the outer lock wide open, and through the outer lock, the *Servadac,* floating in starry dust.

THEY STOOD looking at it for a moment.

"It fits in the pattern," muttered the chief engineer finally. "We go in, we're locked up and given a test. If we succeed, they open the locks. We can either go out or go on. I guess it's extra points if we go on."

"I wonder what happens if we don't succeed?" asked Neil.

"That's easy," Weston said. "Logically, we stay locked for ever."

"Cheery thought!"

It was. The three of them chewed on it for a while.

"Well," asked Neil at last, "do we go on, or do we go out?"

"Let's go on," suggested Weston. "It's a risk, but I think it's worth it."

"I wonder," muttered Neil. But he followed the others across the new lock.

"I'll be doggoned!" exclaimed Weston.

"No clang this time," observed Hank.

They were in another cubic

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chamber, slightly larger than the first two, and with two other differences.

In the center of the chamber, a candle burned in a silvery chandelier; from one of the side walls projected three hangers.

"Oh, no," said Neil. "No, no, no, *no*!"

"They want us to take our suits off," said Weston. "Now that's asking a lot! Is it real, Hank?"

THE MECHANIC had bent down and was examining the candle. "Looks so, sir, but I wouldn't count on it! I've gone through a solid-looking wall as if it were vapor since I came in."

"And locks have such a way of conveniently vanishing or clanging ponderously on us," said Weston. "Look, let's check our gauges and see."

The suits had gauges adapted to them which measured atmospheric pressure and, within limits, could determine the chemical composition of whatever gases they might be moving within.

"A little thin, but looks healthy," Weston said finally. "I can't understand how they keep it in with the outer lock open! Well, shall we undress, gentlemen?"

"No!" objected Neil again. "I won't do it! It's a trap!"

"The outer lock is still open," said Hank. "We can walk out any time if we want."

"What do you think, Jessup?" asked Weston.

The mechanic stood thinking for a moment and then, shrugging his shoulders, unclapped the metal locks of his suit and unzipped it with a swift movement. The other two drew back a step involuntarily.

The suit fell from Hank Jessup's body, dangling from the gloves, helmet and shoes. The mechanic hesitated a second and then took his hands up and removed his helmet.

CLEAN, pure mountain air filled his nostrils. He inhaled deeply, expanding his chest, and laughed, for he had suspected the worst, and it felt good to be alive.

As he stood exultant, again the crystalline bells rang, this time through the room, festive and fairylike.

"You got guts, Jessup," said Weston, shedding his own suit. "I wouldn't have been the first for the life of me!"

"It was a good gamble. After all, if they wanted to kill us, they could have done so long ago. What would be the point of fatal tricks now?"

"They might have a perverted sense of humor," said Weston, peeling his gloves.

"I thought of that, too," said Hank, smiling grimly. He bent and took his shoes off. Neil had finally started unzipping his own suit.

"Nice air, isn't it?" asked

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Weston, breathing hard. "Wish we had something like this on the *Servadac*. I may be crazy, but it smells of pine trees to me."

Hank nodded. "Smells like mountain air, all right. Long time no sniff."

"You can say that again." Suddenly the chief engineer pointed at Neil and started laughing. The Second officer had taken his helmet off and was carefully sniffing the air.

"What's the matter, Neil, old boy? Something burning?"

Neil finished shedding his suit with a most unwilling manner.

"He seems to be expecting the air to go puff at a moment's notice," said Weston.

"You know," said Neil, "that might happen. Suppose we don't pass the next test, whatever it may be, and they do just that? Huh?"

WESTON stopped laughing and concentrated on folding his suit.

"I wonder how they knew there were three of us," said the mechanic pointing at the hangers.

"That's all you wonder? I wonder how they reproduced so perfectly the shape of the hangers in our own ship!"

Hank was startled by the realization that the chief engineer was perfectly right. The hangers did have the same shape and dimensions of those in their ship.

"It's all too screwy, if you ask me," said Neil, hanging his suit. "I don't like it at all."

"We don't like it much more than you do, old boy," said Weston, hanging his own suit. "Well, Jessup, are you going to stay goggling at the hanger forever? Hang your suit, man!"

Hank awakened from his contemplation and hung his suit.

Clang!

THEY COULDN'T help jumping. The lock through which they had come in had disappeared, and a new one gaped dark on the opposite wall.

The metallic boom rang deafeningly through the walls now that they had their suits off.

"Smooth," said Weston in a low voice. "Very smooth. Until all of us hung up our suits, they left it open. As long as one had not decided to go on, they didn't close it. Very smooth!"

"You may disagree with me," said Neil, "but that clang sounded awfully definitive!"

They turned to the new gaping, dark hole and studied it silently. "I'll tell you what," said Neil, "I'm going through that hole because there's nothing else I can do, but I'm taking some protection along!"

He went to his suit, unfastened the shoulder holster and strapped it over his regula-

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tion overalls. Then he unscrewed the helmet lamp and adjusted it for hand use.

"Not a bad idea at that," agreed Weston. "I'm doing the same. What about you, Hank?"

The mechanic shrugged his huge shoulders. "Can't see much use for it, but I'd be crazy if I didn't do the same."

"Well?" asked Weston when they had armed themselves and held their lamps in hand.

"Let's go," said Neil.

They went through.

"No clang again," said the mechanic.

"Now just what is this?!" exclaimed Weston, looking around.

"A nightmare chamber," said Neil.

THE CELL was cubic and of the same dimensions as the last one. It was completely bare, but it had three closed locks, one on the surface of each wall in front of them.

On the lock to the right was painted a humanoid figure. It was naked, hairy, and its features were organized in a way subtly different from human physiognomy. Something in the relative position of nose, eyes, mouth and ears made it alien without making it repugnant.

On the lock to the left was painted a monster. It was something out of a nightmare, a hallucination of ten eyes and ferocious jaws, a cross between a spider and a bullfrog. They shuddered as they looked at it.

On the lock facing them was painted something beyond monstrosity. As they looked at it, their knees felt as if they would give way under them.

"The Museum of Madame Tussaud," whispered Weston. "God! Are *those* they?"

"I told you it was a trap," said Neil. "Let's get out of here!"

They turned. The lock to the next cell had disappeared.

"We're dead," whispered Neil, growing pale as a sheet. He took out his gun. He held it in his trembling hand. "We're dead!" he shouted. *"Dead!* Let us out of here!"

The shout echoed through the chamber of horrors, reverberated on each wall, came back mockingly to their ears.

They stood there, three men, and looked at the figures.

"I wonder which door is going to open first." Neil's forehead was streaming with perspiration.

Hank Jessup laughed. "Can't you see?! *We're supposed to choose!"*

IV

FOR A MOMENT, the others stared at him. Then Neil began to laugh, began to shake all over. His laugh developed into guffaws, and as he guf-

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fawed, tears began to stream down his cheeks.

Weston turned to the second officer and slapped him sharply across the mouth. Neil made a sound like a child and hid his face behind his hands, gun and all. "Take hold of yourself! Hysteria is the last thing we want!"

He turned to the mechanic. "What makes you think they want us to choose, Jessup?"

"It fits," said Hank; "it all fits. They let us choose all the time, didn't they? They never made the first move, did they? No. They left us the initiative, except when they sucked me in the first time."

"Some initiative!"

"Sure, it's tough. But remember, we could have gone out; we stayed because we wanted to."

"Don't remind me of that mistake," said the chief engineer. "I'll regret it for the rest of my life, which I suspect is going to be very short."

"What are you so afraid of, you two? Here are three doors. We can choose between them. Behind them are the people who built this cube—the people who are testing us. They obviously want to meet us. What's there to be afraid of?"

"Neil, he asks what's there to be afraid of."

NEIL LAUGHED again, but this time his laughter was weaker and closer to normality. He jerked his thumb towards the front wall. "Now would you like to meet that? Would you invite it to our ship? Let's take it to meet the captain. Let's invite it for tea." He laughed again. "God!"

"But what law says we've got to meet *that* one?" asked Hank. "Look at the wall on the right! That thing isn't human, sure, but it's mighty close to it. It's almost like us. What's wrong with meeting it?"

"I'll meet it all right," said Neil, weighing his gun; "I'll put a sonic beam right between its popping eyes!"

"You will do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Weston sharply. "These beings have done us no harm so far; what do you want to do, start a war? From what I've seen here, Sol wouldn't stand a chance against them at present. Neil, be yourself, you're letting this thing get away with you!"

"O.K. we go in and say hello. O.K. But if you don't mind, I'll keep the gun in my hand."

"As long as you don't shoot! Let's not be the first to start anything."

"Let's not start anything, period," said Hank. "Or I've got a feeling that whatever we start, they'll finish."

"All right," said Weston, "it's understood. No first move. We don't shoot unless we're shot at!"

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IT SOUNDED silly; but the others nodded.

"How do we get it to open?" asked Neil. "I see no doorknob."

"Let's walk towards the door," suggested the chief engineer. "Perhaps that will do the trick."

Together they moved towards the door; the door opened.

Behind it was the *Servadac*.

They looked at their ship, floating silently, peacefully in the dark of space, screened in rubies and saphires and emeralds, its portholes shedding golden light, friendly light, warm, welcoming, human.

They stared at it.

"I don't understand," muttered Neil. "What's the meaning of this? Why do they let us go?"

"We chose the human shape, didn't we?" Hank pointed. "There's the human shape. Our own people. We're free to go."

"Without our spacesuits?" asked Neil caustically.

Weston touched his arm. "Look."

THEY TURNED. The porthole to the past cell was open; they could see their suits on the hangers.

"Very logical, very fair, very sporting," said Weston. "I didn't hear any silver bells, did you, Jessup?"

"No, sir; not this time."

"I'd say we've failed our little test."

"Yeah."

"If you want the human shape, there it is. That's what they are telling us."

"You mean," asked Neil, "they're really letting us go? Go back? To our people?"

"Yes," said Weston. "Only, we can't go." He looked at the mechanic. "Can we, Jessup?"

"No," said Hank, shaking his head.

The second officer stared wide-eyed at them. "What do you mean, *no?* They're letting us free, can't you see? We can go back!"

"That," said the chief engineer, "would mean we quit."

"So we quit! So what?"

"We can't, Neil. Can't you see? This isn't only us; it's the whole race. These things are testing us, seeing how intelligent we are, how much guts we have. We can't quit!"

"Maybe you can't, but *I* can and I will."

"You move to that porthole, and I'll blast you dead." Weston held his gun in his hand, and it was firm. "I'm sorry, Neil, but I mean it; you're going in with us. You may be a coward, but they aren't going to know that humans are cowards. Take your pick right now."

"I can shoot, too." Neil leveled his gun at the chief engineer's chest.

HANK JESSUP hit him. The mechanic moved with such spontaneity, such a carefree swing of trained, pliant, dynamic strength, that

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none of the other two saw him move. But Neil was down, unconscious, and his gun had slid along the floor to the far edge of the cubic cell.

"Wow!" said Weston.

"That takes care of him," murmured the mechanic.

"I don't think I'd like to start an argument with you, Jessup," said the chief engineer. "Is he dead?"

"God, no. I hit him l i g h t. Look, he's moving."

"Get his gun and hold it."

"I could have a nice court martial for this," muttered Hank going after the gun.

"As civilian chief engineer, I'm still Nilson's superior," said Weston; "you acted under orders."

"Thanks," said Hank.

The second officer moaned, sat up, and took his hands to his chin.

"Get up, Neil," said Weston.

"Who hit me?" asked the mate.

"Jessup hit you. Get up!"

"He packs a wallop. My head is going round and round!"

"GET UP," repeated Weston. He pulled the other by the arm. N e i l got up, still uncertain on his feet.

"Are you feeling better?"

"Are you kidding?"

"Are you going with us or not?"

"I don't seem to have much choice, do I?"

"O.K. We'll be watching you. Give him his gun, Jessup."

Hank held the gun towards the mate, butt first. Neil took it and grinned weakly. "I'm all right now. Guess I was a little nervous. No hard feelings, Jessup."

The m e c h a n i c saluted. "Thank you, sir."

"T h a t ' s right," muttered Neil, "I'm your superior officer; I seem to have forgotten it. I should be giving the example here. Instead..."

He turned to the chief engineer. "O.K., Weston, you run the show now. What do we do?"

The c h i e f e n g i n e e r shrugged. "We go in."

"Sure. But w h e r e? Let's pick one. We have two nightmares waiting for us. Which one do we choose? The spider thing, or..." he shuddered "the other?"

"We took the least of three evils before, and failed," said Weston. "I suggest we take the worst this time."

THEY LOOKED at the door and the painting on it. Neil licked his lips nervously. "So it's that. My God, Weston, if I live through this I'll start a scrap with you some day!"

"Save your fighting spirit," said the chief engineer grimly. "You may be needing it soon!"

"My feet keep trying to take me the other way," said Neil.

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"So do mine." Weston moved forward.

The others followed.

The door opened.

Behind it, was darkness. They stopped in front of the darkness, tried to penetrate it with their eyes.

"I think I see something move," whispered Neil, holding his gun in front of him.

"So do I," said Weston. "But I can't make out what it is."

"Give you three guesses."

"Never mind."

"Aren't we going in?"

"Sure we are."

But they stood their ground in spite of themselves, looking forward, straining to see.

"We can't stay here forever," said Hank through clenched teeth.

"No, we can't," agreed Weston. With an effort, he advanced. The others followed almost at the same time.

They entered the darkness.

Clang!

"DON'T LOOK behind, boys," whispered Neil, "But I think we've just been locked in."

"No lights this time," muttered Weston.

"No bells," whispered Hank.

"We failed again," said Weston. His voice quavered.

"And it's your fault," burst out Neil, fiercely. "Your fault, Weston, damn you!"

"I didn't know!" exclaimed Weston in desperation. *"I didn't know!"*

The Thing moved.

It came towards them, coiling, folding and unfolding upon itself, its movement pure loathesomeness, sheer horror, all of it a putrid mass of decaying protoplasm. They could feel its foetor in their nostrils as a humid, warm gust. They choked on it. Bright red little things crawled within the mass, phosphorescent with a reddish light that revealed the creature in its approach, revealed it in all its terror.

"I can't stand it," said Neil, his voice toneless; "I can't stand it, Weston."

"Don't move," said Hank, his huge body trembling. "For heaven's sake, don't move!"

"Who's moving?"

THEY WERE pressing against the wall, their hands instinctively feeling for the lock that was no longer there.

Still the creature crept closer, making a sucking noise as its bulk propelled itself along the floor. It became swollen and tinted with purplish red. It loomed formidable before them, and they saw that the red things crawling in it looked like a hundred shifting mouths, gaping, hungry. They thought they saw sharp teeth glittering through the scarlet lips, they felt the added stench of breath in the foetor.

Neil screamed and fired.

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"No!" shouted Hank.

But it was too late. The thin, piercing wail that was a harmonic of the subsonic beam cut into their eardrums. The red mouths all opened at once, and a roar that was a scream and a cry of fury raked through their heads. Something shot from within the seething mass, shot at them like lightning.

"Neil!" cried Weston.

They saw the second officer, his face contorted into a grimace of horror, enveloped by a semi-liquid ribbon of gelatinous matter, lifted from the floor and pulled towards the greyish terror. They heard him scream.

"No!" sobbed Weston.

BUT NEIL'S death scream was gone; so was Neil. The seething pulp made a sucking sound, and smacked as a mouth smacks that has been fed a good piece, and the red mouths snapped shut. The thing seemed to be suffering a strain. The two remaining men saw, their hair on end, a silhouette rise within the formless thing, a silhouette enveloped by it, a silhouette that struggled for a moment, waved desperate, rapidly dissoling appendages...

And then the silhouette melted and was gone.

"Neil," muttered Weston, his voice hoarse. "Neil, you poor fool! I killed him, Jessup. *I* forced him to come with us."

"Forget Neil; he's gone," said the mechanic between his clenched teeth. "Think of us!"

Again the thing moved, moved towards them, sucking at the floor with delighted anticipation.

"I can't stand it," said Weston. "Jessup, I..."

The thing opened its hundred mouths.

Weston screamed, rose his gun to his head.

Hank saw the ribbon snap from the creature's substance, and instinctively shut his eyes, waiting for the horrible sucking noise and the smack to repeat themselves.

"Jessup!" Weston's voice, so strained as to be almost unrecognizable, came to his ears.

V

HANK JESSUP opened his eyes. The chief engineer was still by his side, trembling convulsively, his armed hand raised high above his head. Clasped around his wrist, the gelatinous ribbon kept his arm high.

"Jessup," whispered Weston, *"it stopped me from killing myself!"*

"Don't move," said Hank. "Don't fight it! Stand still."

Weston stood still.

"Relax your muscles," said the mechanic. "Relax your body; let it hold your arm as it pleases."

He saw the other's teeth clench, he heard them gnash. Then, little by little, Wes-

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ton's body relaxed. The mechanic could almost feel the other's effort of will. They stood there, immobile, and the greyish horror stood immobile before them.

Then, slowly, very slow, the ribbon uncoiled itself from Weston's wrist and retreated into the creature's substance.

Hank could hear the chief engineer's sigh of relief.

The ribbon shot out again, and they tensed. But it rose only to the height of Hank's chest and remained there for a moment that was eternity. Then it doubled its tip over itself, once, twice. It stopped for a little and repeated the movement.

"It's beckoning us," said Hank, his eyes on the formless mass. With a tremendous effort of will, he moved forward.

"Jessup, don't...!" muttered Weston.

The mass hollowed out in the middle and its sides crawled forward. The ribbon beckoned again. Again the mechanic forced himself to step forward.

"Jessup, for heaven's... *It's enveloping you!*"

IT WAS. AS the mechanic stood there, little beads of sweat running down the creases of his face and from behind his ears and down his back into his dampened overalls; the thing stretched two arms around him, swelled around him, purplish again, the red mouths open again. He bit hard into his lips to stop a scream and stood rigid as the thing closed a ring around him, and rose as a wave, and came closer...

"Jessup! My God..."

The thing touched him, and Hank's skin crawled. All his body shook in a violent convulsion. His fingers tightened around the gun until the bones almost shot through the skin at the articulations. For a moment he thought that the urge to shoot at the thing, shoot at himself, shoot, shoot, shoot, would have the best of him. It grew inside him as a red haze; it came up his chest into his throat, it blinded his eyes in a crimson flash of revulsion and fear.

The thing enveloped him, pressed itself against him, tightened its coils around his legs, the pressure raising towards his waist.

Suddenly, the tension was gone from his body. It slackened, became limp. He felt no more power to be horrified or repelled. He felt indifferent. The situation had surpassed his emotional capacity, and his brain was beyond excitement.

He swung his arm listlessly, and threw his gun back over his shoulder. It hit metal and clanged; it fell on the floor and clanged again.

The whole room was filled with the sound of crystalline silver bells.

"We made it!" said Weston

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behind him. "Jessup, you made it!"

BUT HANK JESSUP was standing in the middle of the thing still, and though a wave of triumph ran through him, wonder grew in him greater than the triumph itself, for the silvery sound came through the thing's hundred mouths!

As he doubted the evidence of his own ears, the sound repeated itself, the bells tolled, harmonious, unmistakable, their ethereal delicacy vibrating with strings of eerie notes.

"Why..." said Weston behind him, "the sound comes from it!"

"Throw your gun down, sir, please," said the mechanic. He was smiling.

Weston's gun clanked on the floor behind him.

Instantly, the creature began to uncoil itself from around Hank, retreated, always with the sucking sound, pressed against the side wall.

"It's making way for us," said Hank. "Come on, sir."

Weston came forward, his steps hesitant at first, then firm, though his face was pale as a ghost. The two men stood side by side, looking.

As the thing moved towards the wall, an open lock stood revealed at the end of what they could see, now, was an elongated corridor.

"My God, isn't it over yet?" muttered the chief engineer.

"I guess not," said the mechanic.

"It's like a nightmare," said Weston, "only worse."

A ribbon shut from the creature's substance, pointed the open lock. The mass pressed itself harder against the wall, making more way for them.

"Let's go," said Hank soberly.

THE MECHANIC edged his way by the creature, and the chief engineer followed him with an involuntary shudder. The mass remained immobile, and the ribbon-like pseudopod contracted into it to let them pass. The red mouths were shut. The thing was silent.

As they reached the end of the coridor, Weston said in a whisper: "I can't understand how the subsonic didn't kill it!"

"I thought of that before we came in," answered the mechanic in the same tone. "The beam is rigged for carbon resonance. That thing must be an organism built on totally different lines from Solar life!"

They crossed the lock.

Clang!

"There we go again," said Weston. "Lord, won't this ever end?"

"A shop," said the mechanic. A new interest lit up in his tired eyes. He was on familiar ground.

The cell was slightly larger than the last one before

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the corridor, and several pieces of metal and wire coils were strewn all over the floor. Among them were scattered tools and what was obviously machine parts.

ON A SIDE wall hung an enormous chart. "A humanoid robot," said Weston. "I'll be damned!"

"A puzzle, I guess," said the mechanic. "We have to rig it up."

"Look at that crazy wiring," said Weston, examining the chart. "What *does* the thing work on? Those circuits are neither electrical nor atomic. Gravitic? Hum..."

"Shall we rig it up?" asked Hank.

"I think that's what we're supposed to do," said Weston. "They must be testing our mechanical ability. You're a mechanic, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir, but I'm a gunman."

"That doesn't matter; between you and me we ought to be able to figure this thing out. I only wish we could have Neil with us." He sighed. "I don't think I'll ever forget the way he died, as long as I live. Jessup, we can't ever make friends with that thing outside!"

"It didn't attack us until it was attacked," the mechanic reminded him.

"All the same, I just can't stand it!"

"NEITHER can I," confessed the mechanic. "The way I see it, they're trying to teach us a lesson at the same time that they test us. There's a system behind all this. Men have been attacked and eaten before—what impresses us so much this time is not the way Neil died, but the fact we know that the thing that ate him is at least as intelligent as we are! This shows a disregard, an indifference to human life that goes beyond all that makes us noble and sovereign in our universe.

"I think they planned it that way. I think we're being told that intelligence *can* exist under completely different forms from ours. And they're telling us the hard way—the way we won't forget! It's very easy to imagine alien beings, but it isn't so easy to face them—it goes against all previous experience."

"It's probably out of the racial memory," said the chief engineer. "That would account for our terror."

"To think," said the mechanic, "that that obscenity may have feelings like us, and conceive of beauty, of love, of truth, perhaps even worship God!...Neil couldn't take it. I wonder what would have happened if we hadn't been able to face it either."

Weston shuddered. "You saw how he died."

"No, that's not what I

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mean; I don't mean us—I mean the human race. I wonder how they would have dealt with mankind if we, also, had done what Neil did."

"Annihilate us?"

The mechanic shook his head. "No, I don't think so. I think they'd have quarantined us. We've just reached beyond our last planet, and we're all set to try for the stars. I think that's why they're testing us—to see if we can stand meeting totally alien forms of life. If we can't, they won't let us get away from Sol."

"They may also come in hordes to the system," suggested the chief engineer bitterly, "and hunt us down and eat us. I wouldn't put it beyond them. They seem to like the way we taste!"

This silenced the mechanic. Neil's fate was still fresh in his memory.

"I guess we might as well start working," said Weston after awhile. "Let's first sort those parts out."

THEY WORKED concentratedly, worrying over the diagrams as they assembled and rigged parts. The work was technically contrived, but not difficult.

"One thing I can't get," said Weston presently, "do you remember that porthole with our ship showing through it? The last one?"

"Yes?"

"Well, we've been coming through this nightmare cube in a straight line since we came in. Now, that door was at right angles with our direction; and yet, when it opened, we saw the *Servadac* through it. Perpendicular to the position where we last saw it. How do you explain it?"

"Perhaps the ship moved, or the cube moved," said Hank.

"Perhaps. Look, this thing doesn't fit in any of the diagrams at all."

"Looks like a club," said Hank. He lifted the elongated metal tube with a grimace. "It's quite heavy."

"Let it be. Say, *look* at this wiring! Man, this machine is crazy!"

"Only one eye," said Hank. "What a queer face!"

They worked on, absorbed in the assembling and rigging that they both were so familiar with, and a metallic shape began to rise under their concerted efforts, a metal giant three or four inches taller than the mechanic himself.

"It looks threatening, doesn't it?"

IN TWO HOURS, the robot stood finally finished, immobile, cold, expressionless, its only glassy eye staring vacantly from an otherwise smooth steel face.

"Well, we beat all records of robot rigging here," said Hank.

"Easy with most of the work already done for you," said Weston. "I think we're

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supposed to activate it. Look at the arrow on the diagram. It points to that button on the top of the head. You do it, Jessup; I'd have to c l i m b a ladder to get to this thing's head."

The mechanic stood on his tiptoes and managed to press the button. A strange, powerful humming filled the cell, and he stepped back hastily and stood by Weston, who was eyeing the robot with a creator's pride in his face.

The robot's eye began to glow, slowly, lighting up to a blood red intensity. The machine moved its head, turned it slightly, and the red light fell straight on them.

"Howdy," said W e s t o n. "What's it you do, old fellow?"

VI

THE ROBOT turned its head more, bent it down slowly. The red flare swept along the floor, touched the clublike tube where Hank had left it.

The red glow stopped on the tube.

"I guess the tube *is* part of it, after all," said Weston.

The robot hummed more intensely. It stepped gingerly towards the club. It bent and picked it up.

"Weston, this thing is dangerous!" e x c l a i m e d Hank suddenly, anxiety-painting itself on his face.

The chief engineer looked at him and laughed. "A robot?! Are you forgetting the first law of robotics? A robot does not attack a human being!"

The mechanic stared incredulously at the chief engineer. Was he blind? Or did the fatigue of the last few hours p r e v e n t him from thinking? "This isn't a human robot!"

The robot turned towards them, the buzzing changed into a higher pitch, the tube firm on one of its silvery claws.

It came ponderously towards them.

"Weston, *duck!*" exclaimed the mechanic.

"This is just another test..." began the chief engineer.

The robot was almost on them, its buzzing now a high whine, its only eye beaming furiously.

"You fool, Weston!" shouted H a n k desperately. He pushed the other man violently against the side wall, and ducked in the opposite direction.

The whine turned into an infernal wail, the robot struck exactly where their heads had been. The club clanged violently against the wall.

"The b u t t o n!" shouted Weston. "Hank, the button!"

The chief engineer jumped towards the robot.

THE MACHINE turned to met him in a incredibly swift movement, and bathed him in red light. The clubbed

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arm was up and down like a flash. There was a soft but loud thud; blood and cerebral matter splashed all over the walls as Weston's head cracked open like an egg shell. The chief engineer's body slumped against one of the walls, twitching with aimless reflexes from the rapidly disintegrating nervous centers.

The robot turned its eye on Hank Jessup.

The mechanic jumped and ducked, and the club fell thunderously against the floor one inch behind his heels. He turned with tiger-like reflexes, thanking the gods for a rough life where his strength and agility had often meant the difference between life and death.

The club whizzing around it like a helix, the robot went after him.

The man and the machine danced around each other, the man jumping desperately one second ahead of the glittering, deadly club, silent and sweating, the robot whining furiously and following him with its mad red eye. Hank Jessup appraised the situation with the practice of many struggles. It was almost like wrestling. As long as he kept moving as fast as he did now, he might escape the club; but he was rapidly losing his breath. To disconnect the robot, he had to reach for the button; but under the rain of blows, even if he did disconnect it, he wouldn't be able to escape death before the machine stopped. He had to distract the robot in some way, force a pause into the whirling arm. He watched for a chance, his nerves, tendons, muscles turned into taut wire.

THE ROBOT came towards him once more, its walk ponderous and slow, but its club deadly fast. Hank jumped, stepped on blood and brains from the dead man, fell. The robot stepped towards him, its armed claw swinging back. The man saw death coming to him.

At this last moment, in an instinctive reflex, he kicked violently at the robot's half raised foot. He caught it, struck; the momentum added to the robot's own, the machine bent beyond its line of equilibrium; Jessup visualized what was going to happen as the club whizzed past his head and ruffled his hair with the cold touch of death's fingers. He flung his body aside, landed on Weston's corpse, now still.

The robot fell thunderously where his bones had been one moment before.

Hank Jessup gathered his feet under himself with an agility that he would never have believed he possessed, and jumped towards the fallen giant. As the robot struggled halfway on its feet, the club already rising again, the man's hand reached the top of its neck, frantically trying

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for the head. The robot continued to rise with irresistible force, and Hank jumped on it, climbed on it, stretched himself desperately, reached up.

The robot's armed claw was raised, the club beginning to descend towards the man on its back, when Hank's fingers reached the head button, pressed on it convulsively.

The robot froze. Its wail subsided to a buzz and disappeared. The red glow faded and became extinct in its only eye.

AS THE MAN fell limply to the floor, breathless, bathed in cold sweat, crystalline silver bells echoed through the bespattered cell.

But this time Jessup felt no triumph, only bitterness.

He lifted himself on his hands, looked forward; between the robot's frozen legs, he could see that the lock through which he had come was open, and the corridor beyond was empty. The alien was gone. At the end of the corridor, he could see the open lock to the next cell, and the open lock to the next, with the tips of the abandone spacesuits. Beyond, he saw another open lock, and another; and once more beyond, he saw the outer lock, and the *Servadae* floating peacefully against its starry background.

He turned his tired head to the other side and saw what he had guessed would be there: another dark lock open were there had been none.

He laughed gently, slowly; sat up, rested his head against the cold legs of the robot.

A strange vibration started around him. He lifted his head, and saw a strange sight. The walls seemed to turn hazy, indistinct; and Weston's scattered blood turned paler and paler and finally disappeared. He turned to look at the corpse, and saw it melt gradually on the floor, melt as hot butter, and disappear through it. The sight barely made an impression on his brain.

"Two gone, one more to go," he murmured.

THE VIBRATION stopped. The walls, the ceiling, the floor, were once more immaculate, cold, shining silver. The robot was still a giant of steel against whose leg he leaned.

The infernal artfulness of it all, thought Jessup. Each time, they, themselves, had chosen the way to their own destruction. This last time they even had built it with their own hands.

Oh, curse *their* subtle, infernal souls, if any!

Wearily, he struggled to his feet, looked at the open door to freedom, looked at the open door to the unknown. He laughed again, mirthlessly, and moved towards the door of his choice.

Clang!

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He looked around. The cell was bare as the first one had been, small as the first one had been, expressionless as the first one had been. He waited a moment for something to happen.

Nothing happened.

After a while, Hank Jessup forced himself to move. No monster, no machine, no nothing. He was obviously expected to make the first move.

As usual.

He turned towards the place where the lock had been, touched it, half expecting his hands to go through the metal, as before. They didn't. His fingers touched the cold, yet glowing surface. He turned towards the other wall, thinking that might be it, and his heart tightened in his chest.

The cell had shrunk in size.

He blinked his eyes, waved his head, looked again. There was no doubt. Even as he looked, the other wall was closer, the side walls were closer. He looked up, the ceiling was closer.

"No," he said aloud. "No."

THE WALLS shrank towards him, slow, silent, cold and glowing. The cell shrank. He reached up his arm, and the tip of his fingers could touch the ceiling. One moment later, the palm of his hand could rest against it. One moment later, he had to bend his arm.

With an agonized cry, he jumped forward, crashed his body against the other wall, in a maddened hope that it would give way, that it would melt, that he would go through. He succeeded only in hurting his already-tired body.

Frantic, he reached for the other walls, touched them all over, his fingers restless, desperate. Nothing. Solid surfaces.

He crouched like a persecuted animal, looked around himself.

The cell kept closing on him.

"No!" he exclaimed again. Tears were running down his face. "No!"

Even as death came closer, even as he gave way to half-madness and dark despair, so curious is the human mind, part of his brain wondered how did they manage to make the whole cell shrink in size; the mechanic in him knew it to be impossible to shrink more than one dimension at a time in a rigid system, and asked a question...

But just for a moment; for, as the ceiling touched his head and the side walls touched his shoulders where he crouched, the last spark of humanity went from him. He whimpered like an idiot or a child, and made himself into a trembling ball, edging desperately away from the inexorable pressure.

As the walls started crushing him from all sides, the light went out from them.

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His animal scream pierced the engulfing darkness before he entered oblivion.

VII.

BUT THERE, in the cold of space, the *Servadae* glowed and waited, the men moved and whispered. The silver cube kept gleaming, silvery-green, cold and immobile, its dark eye open and staring.

Captain Aram Daniels pressed his lips, bit his lips, chewed his fingernails. "Three hours," he said to himself, again and again. "Three hours!"

"Three hours," the crew told each other, their faces tense, their brows worried, "three hours!"

No more men were allowed to go out after communication with the three scouts had been cut off. The captain wanted to risk no more lives. He had also given urgent orders that no one was to shoot, or in any other way attack the cube until it became definitively evident that those who had entered it would never come back.

Out in the cold of space, in the middle of the endless cosmic spawn, ship and cube looked at each other, stalked each other, the ship warm with human and worrying life, the cube cold and indifferent as its own metal. They waited and waited. One hoped—the other looked on with the detachment of something beyond humanity—or below it.

SUDDENLY, the men shouted inside the ship; the telephone rang in the shiper's cabin, several men came running towards it.

"What's it?"

"A man!"

"No, that's not our spacesuits!"

"That thing isn't human!"

"What's those tubes it's dragging along?"

"Stand by!" came the order through the loudspeakers. "Don't fire until order!"

"Look, the tubes are transparent!"

A moment later, a shout rang through the whole ship.

"It's them!"

"It wants to come in! It's signalling!"

"Don't fire!" the loudspeakers shouted again. "Let them in!"

THE ALIEN stood, strange with its asymmetric face and bulging eyes, and Daniels and his staff looked on at the tubes with amazed faces.

"They'll come to presently," said the alien. His voice was high-pitched, but he spoke in very good English.

"But how come?" asked the captain, still dazed. "How come?"

The alien took an eight-fingered hand to his chin. It was, as they would later learn, his race's equivalent to shrugging one's shoulders.

"We regret that they had

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to pass through such a strain," he said, "but you must realize that when the fate of several star systems is at stake, one cannot be too considerate of the survival of individuals. We sincerely apologize for the absence of your Second officer, but his bodily substance was absorbed by Kli Gor almost instantaneously, and it was impossible to reassemble his organism.

"We want to assure you that we are very sorry for the incident, and will gladly make any reparation Sol may deem necessary; but you must understand that Kli Gor risked his life just as much as your men by facing them the way he did. Since it had been estimated that you would classify as degree three intelligences, and since he is degree seven, he felt justified in assuring his survival against the man's own."

The alien shut his eyes, which was the way he smiled, and opened them again. "After all, we must remember that we both stand to Kli Gor more or less in the same scale as your dogs stand to you."

"I shall forward your explanation to my superiors, and they shall decide," said Daniels. He raised his hand, that held foam-like, glittering pieces of tissue covered with complex mathematical symbols. "And these charts?..."

"These are all third degree star systems or third degree planets in higher star systems. The...pardon me if I translate badly—the Galactic Council suggests that for the next few centuries you limit yourselves to visiting those, and avoid other systems whose form of life is too alien to your own. Even though one of your men successfully withstood the test of Kli Gor's presence, our instruments prove beyond doubt that intercommunication will be undesirable between you and races like his for a long time to come."

ONE OF the figures lying in the transparent tubes turned and moaned.

"If they're hermetically closed, how can we hear him moan?" asked the captain.

Again the alien shut his eyes. "We shall not enter into that," he said. "We do not wish to enslave your civilization with our knowledge; it will be spiritually and intellectually much more satisfactory for you when you discover those things on your own, in your own good time. That you know they are possible is all the clue your ingenious minds need.

"One last word of warning: The fact that you are advised to visit these systems in the charts does not necessarily mean that you shall be welcome there. You may establish commercial intercourse with some; you may have to fight wars against others. Still some others, you may colo-

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nize... The Galactic Council leaves such problems for individual solution. We do not wish to interfere with other's lives; it has been proved that progress comes only through conflict and hardship. We have not made the road easy for you; we have merely made it less difficult."

AGAIN HE donned his transparent helmet. "Neither," he said through it, his voice just as audible as before, "do we forbid you to visit other systems than these if you so wish. We merely advise. You may do as you please; but I am sure it will not be pleasant to your kind if you meet others that you would consider monsters, and they should prove in every way your superiors without catering to your intellectual or moral standards, or even without seeing you as equally lifeworthy beings."

He touched his large belt buckle, and suddenly a thin hum pierced the air. The transparent substance of the tubes that enveloped the two men shimmered, trembled, paled and vanished. Only they remained, still unconscious, now lying on the floor.

"The tall one," said the alien, pointing, "is a remarkable specimen. He resisted through all emotional and intellectual strains successfully, his physical endurance is very great, his *luck*—as you call it—has a very high coefficient. He barely made the fourth grade. Our instruments showed he had an inkling of the solution, but at the last moment animal fear overcame him."

"But how," somebody couldn't help asking, "did you expect the poor fellow to escape your shrinking trap?"

The alien looked at him as if the answer to this question were quite obvious. "Through the fourth dimension, of course."

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the night the TV went out

by George H. Smith

The most horrible thing is that some will consider this a horror story.

THEY WERE sitting in the living room, protected from the menacing darkness by the warm and friendly glow of the TV set—two people who, after six years of marriage, had grown more used to seeing each other in this than in any other light.

It was such a good night for TV, too, one of the best of the week. First there was Uncle Dandy's Quiz Hour; then Jeff and Melvin; and finally Ma & Pa at home. Three of the very best shows, one right after the other.

"And now, Mrs. Lee, when you come out of this, your husband won't know you; you won't even know yourself!" Uncle Dandy said to the fat woman as he strapped her into the make-believe reducing machine that was actually a dye vat. Uncle Dandy was very serious, his gargoyle's face without a trace of smile, but the audience was screaming with laughter. They knew, as did the watchers at home, that the silly woman was going to be dyed a brilliant purple; it served her right, too, for she hadn't known the answers.

And then, suddenly, instead of the familiar scene in Quiz Palace there on the screen was the stern face of a man.

"What would you do?" the voice menaced them. "What would you do if your TV set broke down tonight? How

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could you find a repairman at this hour? What would you *do?*"

"Oh, Andy..." Claire Moore grabbed her husband's arm.

"IMAGINE what it would be like. Imagine what your life would be," the announcer went on. "Could you stand to miss a whole evening of your favorite entertainment?"

His voice became a little more friendly. "There is only one way that you can really be safe..." He left this life line hanging just beyond reach, while he gazed at them with smiling contempt.

"You can be among the thirty million American families that are 'two-set' families. Families that have taken the sensible, American act of acquiring a second set as insurance against the possibility of one set's failure. But ...listen to these shocking facts. We here at TV Sales Incorporated recently conducted a survey and found out that there are still over ten million families in this country who have only one set."

The voice rose now in righteous indignation. "Imagine—that, ladies and gentlemen. In this year of 1967, in this grandest country of them all, there are still ten million heads of households who think so little of their loved ones as to expose them to the inconvenience, the danger, of being without their evening programs. Ten million men who are so thoughtless and so unpatriotic!"

Andrew Moore felt his wife's eyes resting on him in the semi-darkness. He looked at her briefly and had the momentary feeling that there was as much hate in her eyes as there was in the voice of the announcer.

"I CAN ONLY say to those ten million men that they wouldn't be without two cars, would they? They wouldn't be without two washing machines or two refrigerators? They haven't forgotten the immortal words of the President of the United States, have they? Those words from last year's State of the Union message—those words which will forever ring down through the corridors of history."

The announcer's face and voice faded away to be replaced by those of the rugged, tanned, silver-haired President. "America will always be the greatest nation in the world as long as its people remember to buy two, not one. Buy the large economy size, not the small one. This isn't a small country, my fellow Americans, this is a large, economy sized country. We will never know here the declines that set in in Rome and Great Britain as long as we all remember this creed, and that the Big Spon-

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sor up in the sky is always on our side."

"Oh, isn't he wonderful," Claire breathed. "Isn't he just the greatest president we ever had?"

THE ANNOUNCER was back. "That was your President, ladies and gentlemen. That was the President of the United States talking to you. And what are *you* going to do about it?" The smiling face became grim and the steely eyes seemed to probe into Andrew Moore's very soul. "I'll tell you what you're going to do! *You're not going to buy one, you're going to buy two*!" Moore felt very guilty; how could he have been so blind? What if his installment payments were already larger than his salary? There were always ways...

The announcer was replaced by a quintet of blondes who sang, "Don't buy one, buy two, two, two. Don't buy one, buy two and your wife will love you."

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, we bring you..." The screen went blank and there was silence.

"Andy, what's the matter?" Claire gasped, her voice choked with fear. The TV had never been dark before; its friendly green glow had never ceased to light their living room since the day they had ventured forth from the sheltering light of their parents' sets to set up one of their own.

"I'm sure it will come right back on, dear," Moore said, groping uncertainly for the light switch.

"But why should it go off? They never go off any more."

There were no friendly faces, no joyous shouts or jingles; nothing but a horrible, deathly silence. "Oh, what are we going to do?" wailed Claire. "How could you let this happen, Andy? If you loved me, you'd have bought another set a long time ago."

ANDREW MOORE looked at his wife, and she seemed strange in the different light. He had scarcely ever seen her except by the light of the TV, for by the time he got home after putting in his twelve hours at the office, the TV had always been on. And when he had been going with her they had never gotten very far away from her parents' set. He was faintly surprised to see how sickly white her face was.

"But Claire, I do love you," he said in too loud a voice since he wasn't used to talking without the din of the TV. "It's just that right now I can't afford to buy anything else. You don't want me to end up in debtors prison do you?"

"It's just like the man said

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...it's so quiet. And we're going to miss Jeff and Melvin and Ma and Pa. Andy, go get another set! This wouldn't have happened if we had another set," Claire said almost in tears.

"You don't mean tonight?"

"Yes, I *do* mean tonight! Right now! I can't stand this ...it's so quiet and lonely."

"You really want me to... go outside...at night?" Moore couldn't believe it.

"You'll just have to. I'll go insane in this silence. And what will the neighbors think if they notice our set is off? Then they'll know we're one of those one-set families that the President was talking about."

"But, Claire...you know what it's like outside at night. There's no light, and the rodders and night gangs..."

"I'll go crazy, crazy...do you hear?" Claire screamed.

"But, honey, you know we can't afford anything else," Moore said, putting an arm about her shoulders. She shook it off angrily.

"Of course we can afford it. Everyone can afford everything they want these days."

"You mean you want me to put on a collar? To become a client?" Andrew Moore asked, in a shocked voice.

"WELL? WHAT'S so wrong with that?" she demanded, "No one with any sense tries to Free Agent it any more. Look at the Williams'. He signed with Central Electric a year ago, and they've already replaced both their cars."

"But to get those cars, he had to become a bondsman, to sign away the rest of his life. Is that what you want me to do?"

"Look at you, Mr. Free Agent," Claire's voice rose shrilly. "You work twelve hours a day and what have we got to show for it? Not even two TV sets!"

"All right! All right! I'll go out. I'll see if I can find a repairman. It wouldn't do any good to call one 'cause you have to sign a note before they'll come out." He started to put on his protective outer clothing and reached for his smog mask.

Claire was really crying now, and she gasped beween sobs, "Repairs...repairs... what good will that do?"

"Take it easy, dear," Moore said, patting her shoulder. "I'll be back pretty soon, and everything will be all right."

OUTSIDE, Moore groped his way through darkness unbroken by street lights. Los Angeles had long ago done away with such, socialistic anachronisms as street lights; after all street lights meant taxes, and taxes meant less of the good things of life for everybody.

With only his flashlight to break the blackness, Moore headed toward his garage.

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The greasy smog which smeared itself against the driveway swirled aside as he walked and crawled coldly up his pants legs. It clung to his clothes and face mask and muffled his footsteps.

The car, fortunately, coughed into life at once, and he breathed a sigh of relief. Being on foot in the city at night would have been an almost automatic death-sentence; if the hot-rodders didn't catch you, the cops would.

He had no idea which way to go. The darkness and the smog confused him so that he couldn't remember the way to the nearest General TV Store. Taking a chance, he headed toward the freeway. There weren't many cars out at this time of night, so driving was easy, even in the oily thickness; and in a few minutes, he saw the lights of the toll gate directly ahead.

A uniformed employee of Freeways Incorporated took his dollar and let him by with only a faintly-suspicious look; in a few moments he was heading in the Harbor Freeway toward the stack, where he could change to the Hollywood Freeway. In Hollywood, he assured himself, he'd have no trouble locating a TV store or repairman.

He was passing near what had once been the downtown district—he could see dark skeletons of buildings on his left. They were mostly abandoned now as business had drifted to the suburbs.

Suddenly, he saw them coming, and it didn't take much guessing to know what they were. Two souped-up jalopies racing along in the wrong lane with motors wide open, swerving to follow him as he speeded up instinctively. Rodders; teenage killers who hunted the streets for prey like a tiger stalked the jungle.

HIS FOOT pressed the gas pedal to the floor. You'd think that Freeways Incorporated would keep rodders off their roads; but free enterprise being free enterprise Andy guessed the kids' dollars were as good as anyone else's, even if they did leave half-a-dozen wrecks for the company to clear away the next morning.

His little G. A., Model 100, was doing everything it had, but those two cut-down jobs were gaining on him. He could hear the hooting of their horns and sirens, as well as the shouts of the rodders themselves, over the pounding of his own motor now. Pretty soon they would be up with him; pretty soon one of them would start to ease him toward the guard rail while the other one stayed close behind him to box him in. There would be a grinding of brakes and a crashing of metal as he plowed into the rail; then a burst of flame, and there

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would be another kill for them to send pictures of to *Life*.

Sweat poured down Andrew Moore's forehead, and his hands on the steering wheel were soaking wet. If only he hadn't come out; if only he had bought that extra set they needed months ago. Now he was going to die for his lack of foresight.

There were headlights up ahead and a spotlight picked his car out briefly. It was a Pinkerton armored car on patrol, but seeing no protection tag on Moore's windshield, it kept going. Police service was one more thing he hadn't felt he could afford. Now if he were the client of some big firm, he'd automatically have had police protection.

ONE OF THE rodder cars pulled up almost even with him and he could see it was a red convertible with two boys and a girl in the front seat. He could see their faces quite clearly in the rearview mirror and the blood lust he read there chilled him. It wouldn't be long now. If only...

Suddenly he saw a chance. Up ahead was a cut-in with a big sign *Do Not Enter Here*. If only he could throw them off for a few minutes he might—he just might—get away.

With his heart in his mouth, Andrew Moore swerved just as he got to the cut-in. His tires screamed their torture and the car tottered on two wheels; but he missed the guard rail, and one of the two rodder cars failed to make the turn. It kept going straight down the freeway but the other one, the red convertible, kept after him although it lost a little ground.

He was in downtown Los Angeles now; the abandoned buildings and torn-up streets told him that. If he could lose himself in the tangle, he'd be safe.

The streets were terrible. The car bounced and groaned, and there wasn't any light at all—not even that supplied by the hundreds of advertising signs that lined the freeway. For a moment Moore had a vagrant, socialistic thought; maybe it wasn't so bad to have taxes and street lights. And then he wondered if it was really interference with free enterprise to keep business firms from tearing up the old public streets to get materials for building their own toll streets.

THE RODDER CAR was gaining again; Andrew Moore abandoned his subversive thoughts and swerved around a corner into a wider, slightly less torn-up street, and almost lost his life again. This street had been converted into a dump yard and was blocked from curb to curb with piles of scrap metal. He

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slammed on his brakes and came to a skidding halt just short of the first mound. The occupants of the rodder car heard the squeal of brakes and, sensing a kill, came hurtling at him. They weren't to be balked of their prey even if it meant their own lives. Moore quickly clashed his gears and shot into reverse. The red convertible hurtled past, just missing his front fender. It must have been doing almost ninety when it smashed into the metal gate that blocked the entrance to the junk yard itself.

There was a burst of flame and screams that ended rather abruptly. Moore stopped his car and got out. He ran toward the other car as he saw someone scrambling out on hands and knees. He pulled the small figure in jeans and shirt free, and they staggered to safety just as the gas tank blew up with more than ordinary violence.

"Ya killed them! Ya dirty bustard, ya killed them! Why'd ya do it?" Small fists beat at Andy and he pushed the small figure away from him. It was a girl with close cropped hair and grease streaked face.

"I didn't kill anyone; they were trying to kill me, weren't they?"

"So what? Who asked ya to come down here?" He could see now that the girl was crying. Moore looked at her more closely, and decided she couldn't be more than sixteen. "Ya didn't have to kill Joe and Harry. They was good guys."

"LOOK, I'M sorry; I didn't mean to." He tried to pat her shoulder but she clawed at his face with her nails. He pushed her away and she sat down on the curb and started to sob. He stood looking down at her for a minute and then turned to walk toward his car. He had gone only a few feet when her sobs turned to curses.

"Ya dirty, lousy son." Her yells became more intimate, and Andrew Moore felt the back of his neck turning red. He started to reply in equal terms, but the sight of the pitiful little figure sitting there changed his mind. He walked back and stood beside her.

"Come on, kid. We better get out of here," he said gently. "The fire might attract a night gang or the cops."

"I don't care. I hope some one does come, and I hope they kill you."

"Look...I said I'm sorry. I'll drive you home."

"I ain't got any home. There was just Joe and Harry. They picked me up when I was a punk kid of seven. They let me tag along after the orphanage was closed to save taxes. There wasn't nobody but them and the gang."

"Well...couldn't you go back to the gang?"

"Ya green or somethin',

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mister? Ya can't be with the gang 'less ya got a rod. They don't want no footies."

"I wish there was something I could do to help you."

Her reply was less than appreciative.

"Why you little..." Moore started to say, then just shrugged his shoulders. "Look, kid, I've got to go. I was looking for a TV repairman when you and your buddies...never mind. My wife will be worried if I don't get home soon."

"Go to hell!"

"Well, goodbye," Moore said and walked toward his car. The smog was thicker than ever and he wondered if he would be able to find his way out of this jungle of decayed buildings.

"HELLO, MISTER," said a tall, skinny man leaning up against the door of Andrew Moore's car. He wore no smog mask and had several week's growth of beard on his face. "This is a pretty nice buggy ya got here, mister. Musta cost ya quite a lot."

Moore stepped closer, meaning to ignore him and just get into his car. The man shifted just enough so that he was in the way; his watery eyes gleamed red where the headlights reflected in them. There was a reek of cheap wine about him; Moore wondered if he had been soaked in the stuff. "Do you mind if I get into my car?" he asked stiffly.

"What'ya wanta do that for? Why don't ya stick around and talk to me? To me and my buddies?" the man said and as he spoke four other shadowy figures stepped out of the fog.

"What'ya got there?" the first man asked, pointing to the hot-rod girl who was being dragged along by two of the others. Her body was limp and there was blood on her face.

"You'll never guess what we found, Sam" said a man who was as fat as Sam was slim, "You'll never guess."

"Well, now, Fatso," Sam said, "it looks like ya done picked up a little hunk of somethin'."

"Sure did, Sam, we sure did," Fatso chuckled as he caught the girl by the hair and lifted her face into the light. "Not bad-looking stuff either. What you got, Sam?"

"Oh, just a guy. Not much of a guy but he's got a car...and a little dough on him, I hope."

"Well, well," Fatso said, "I guess there ain't four luckier old winos in this jungle than us, is there, boys?" He giggled in a high falsetto voice.

"See here, you....you let that girl alone," Moore said, starting forward. He got two steps before something crashed down on his head and he went down, his face in the filth of the street.

"KIND OF hated to use that bottle on him," he

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heard Sam's voice vaguely. "It still had a few drops in it."

"Well, don't worry; we'll be getting plenty more," Fatso said jovially. "Let's load these two into the car and take them to the Square."

"What? And let all the other bo's in on it?" one of the other men said. "That's for the birds."

"Now, Bert, you're a pretty good guy but you ain't been in L. A. long enough," Sal said evenly. "You don't know this here jungle. Al Rice is the boss around here, Bert, and if you don't do things his way, you don't last long, do you, Fatso?"

Fatso g i g g l e d again. "That's right, Bert. We'll just take these two and the car along to the Square. Chances are that Al will take the car and most of the money for the general fund. But unless he wants this kid himself, we'll get to keep her. It ain't a bad deal, and with several thousand winos you got to have some sort of boss."

"Say, this guy ain't all the way out," Sam said leaning over Moore.

"Well, Sam?" Fatso said. "Sammy boy, put him out."

A heavy boot descended against Andrew Moore's head and darkness closed in.

HE AWOKE to the sound of voices and an almost overpowering evil odor. He was lying on his side on a cement floor, his hands and feet bound. The girl's hard young body was p r e s s e d close against his.

"Ya comin' around, Buster?" she asked.

"Yeah. I guess so," Moore said. "That kick in the head kind of did me in."

"I'll bet. You're just lucky ya got a hard head. After the wine bottle and the boot, you're lucky to be around at all."

"Where are we?"

"Pershing Square. Down in what used to be a big underground garage. Must be the wino headquarters in these parts."

Moore l i f t e d his head slightly and was sorry almost immediately; streaks of fire seemed to leap through it, but he could see a little bit. They were on one of the huge vaulted parking selections, but there weren't many cars in it now—only six or seven old wrecks, and his own G.A. But lying or sitting about dozens of fires were some hundred or so men. The smoke from the fires made the place look like one of the pits of hell.

"What do you think they'll do with us?" Moore asked.

"I don't know," the girl said. "Outside of a few obvious things, that is. Sam and the other boys are in talking to Al, the boss of this jungle."

"I'M SORRY they caught you," Moore said. "Say, what's your name?"

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"Sue. Not that it means anything to you."

"Mine's Andy. I just thought we might as well get to know each other."

"Yeah. Well, it won't be for long," the girl said between set teeth. "Here comes Fatso; I guess we hear the bad news now."

"Well, well...just look at them," the fat man simpered. "All cuddled up together, nice and cozy like." And then with mock severity, "You two behavin' yourselves while we was gone?"

"Go to hell, you fat slob," Sue said.

Fatso bent over them and the reek of cheap wine almost made Andrew Moore retch. "Now that ain't very nice. That's no way to talk to Fatso. You be nice to Fatso, girlie, and Fatso'll be nice to you."

"Don't make me laugh," the girl said. "What's a fruit like you know about being nice to a woman? I bet you don't even know what it's for!"

The fat man bent over the girl with a bottle of wine in one hand. "Oh, come now, girlie. Old Fatso knows a lot of things a kid like you never even thought of. I'll bet he'd make you squeal for more."

"All I can think of right now is a way to kick you," Sue said as her foot lashed out just missing Fatso's groin. He stumbled back laughing.

"IS THAT any way to treat a gentleman?" Fatso addressed himself to Moore as he seated himself on a box beside them. "Bet you didn't know I used to be a gentleman. Well, an important man anyway. Bet you didn't know I used to make $75 a day."

"I'll bet," the girl said. Moore could feel her fingers against his wrist as she worked at his bonds. "The only way you ever made seventy-five bucks wouldn't be fit to talk about."

"That ain't so; that ain't so at all," Fatso said with drunken dignity. "I made it honest. I was a help to the community." He poked a finger in Moore's ribs. "Yes, sir, seventy-five dollars a day; and just for getting up on a witness stand and telling about people."

"What kind of people?" Moore asked, because he could see that the girl was trying to keep the old wino talking.

"Oh, Commies and Reds and things like that. All you had to do was keep telling the Committees they used to have that these people was Reds, and what rats they were. And you got your money. It was real easy back in those days, but finally they ran out of people to investigate and I couldn't make that kind of money any more."

"A stool pigeon, huh?" the girl said. "And a lying one at that." She wasn't having

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much luck with the knots on Moore's wrists.

"THAT AIN'T so; that ain't so at all!" Fatso protested. "I was just doing my duty as a citizen. That ain't any way to talk to old Fatso after he stuck up for you two."

"How did you stick up for us, Fatso?" Moore asked.

"Well, Al and some of the boys was all for taking you two down to Taylor Hospital and getting fifty bucks apiece for you. They don't get much chance to get nice fresh bodies to dissect there any more, so they don't ask questions when you bring a couple in."

Andrew Moore felt cold chills run up his spine and even Sue gasped.

"But old Fatso and some of the other boys agreed that it would be a shame to waste a nice young gal like you," Fatso went on putting a hand on Sue's leg.

"Thanks for small favors," the girl said.

"I told them we could get a lot more than fifty dollar's worth," he giggled. "And then, after they came around to my way of thinking on that, they still wanted to take buster here down and get fifty bucks for him."

"For me?" Moore gulped.

"Yeah, for you," Fatso said, putting a hand on Moore's shoulder. "But I pointed some things out to them." He winked.

"Thanks," Moore gulped, "for small favors."

"Ah, an old fat fool like you couldn't do anything to anybody," Sue gibed. She had given up working at Andy's wrists.

"YOU JUST think so," Fatso said, getting to his feet. He swayed slightly as he lifted the bottle to his lips and drained it. "You know, I oughta show you right now."

"Ah, you couldn't show anybody anything," the girl said and added some personal observations.

Fatso was infuriated. "I'll show you, I'll just show you," he said and reached for the girl. She rolled and twisted out of his reach but he caught her finally, still holding his empty bottle.

Sue wrapped her legs around him and hung on as she cried, "Now, Andy, now. In the back of the head, with your feet."

Fatso tried to pull away, lashing at the girl with his fist and with the bottle. He missed with the bottle and it smashed on the cement. Andrew Moore rocked back painfully on his hands and launched his feet at the fat man's head. It wasn't a powerful blow—it couldn't be with his bound feet—but it knocked Fatso forward and Sue rolled out of the way. The wino hit face-down on the shattered bottle, groaned, shuddered and lay still.

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"Gawd!" Sue said, "That bottle bit. I couldn't have planned it better myself." She watched as blood mixed with wine ran out from under the fat man. She used another piece of the broken bottle to saw at the cords which bound her wrists.

MOST OF the men in the big garage were either asleep or busy about their fires; no one noticed the two until they were almost to Andrew Moore's car; then they had to run for it. Sue tripped up one black-bearded fellow, while Moore dropped another with a stick of wood. They were halfway up the ramp leading to the street before most of the winos and bums knew they were free.

Approximately thirty minutes later, Moore stopped his car at the end of a truck freeway and let Sue out. "I've had enough," she said. "I'm getting out of this town; I don't want any more of it. It's just like all the other big places, strangling itself in smog and too many people. Maybe it ain't any different out in the country, but at least I'm going to give it a try."

Moore shook hands with her. "I'm sorry about Joe and Harry."

"Ah, I guess it was bound to happen sooner or later. I guess there wasn't much future in hot-roddin' anyhow. You're not a bad guy, Andy. It's too bad you're stuck in this town for the rest of your life."

"Maybe I won't be," he said and smiled. "Where you heading for? We might run into each other again."

"Central Valley, I guess. I hear you can pick fruit up there without putting on a company collar."

"Well...so long. I might see you again."

"Not if you sign a company bond for that other TV set," Sue replied, and was gone. A northbound truck was already slowing to pick her up.

ANDREW MOORE stared after the disappearing lights of the truck for a few seconds. As he started his car again, his eyes fell on the big signboard across the highway.

"TIRED OF HARD WORK AND WORRY?" it read. "WANT PEACE AND SECURITY? IT IS WAITING FOR YOU. BECOME A GENERAL AUTO CLIENT. THIS IS THE BEST BONDAGE DEAL IN AMERICA TODAY. ANY LOCAL OFFICE WILL GIVE FULL DETAILS." At the bottom in very small print were the words, *"Despite the propaganda of our competitors, our overseers are not permitted to use whips on clients."*

Moore reached home just as the sun was beginning to peak through the smog. He opened the front door and

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went in to find the TV on and Claire still up.

"Oh there you are," she said. "I see you didn't find a repairman."

"No, I didn't; did it come back on by itself?"

"Oh, no. It was never really off," Claire said and laughed "It's real funny. They just cut it off at the station for fifteen minutes so we could see how it would be without a set. It was awully clever, don't you think?"

"Yeah. Awfully clever," Moore said. "Awfully clever."

★

just evie and me...

by Ron Smith

... but there was something else we hadn't figured on!

I DON'T know why I'm writing this; it will never be read. At least, no one will ever know it just the way it happened. Not in the twentieth century they won't. Because I know how the story reads then.

But, as my kid brother always said (he was one of those magazine writers in the time I come from), writing is good for the soul. It releases tension.

And have I got tension!

My name is Adam Schwartzburger. My wife's name is Eve. We were both born in 1940 in a place called Brooklyn, U.S.A. And maybe it all wouldn't have happened if we hadn't gone to Paris on our honeymoon. That was in 1962.

We had been there two weeks when we rented this car and went on a tour of the countryside. You know, we wanted to see all the scenic spots we'd read about in the folders. And the little villages and the farms. We'd never seen much grass or flowers and it was nice to

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walk through the fields, just Eve and me, all alone. Whole *fields* of flowers. We'd never seen so many.

Now I wish I'd never seen a flower.

It was because we were out walking in one of these fields that we met Justin Le Blanc. He lived alone in this shack on this land he owned, and he carried on all sorts of experiments. He was a scientist.

We dropped by his place and he showed us around. He was an old guy, with white hair and a funny way of talking. I never did understand anything he said.

I don't even remember where he said he came from. All I remember is he had a lot of money—he showed us that. He said if we'd help him in one of his experiments he'd pay us.

And since Eve and I had sunk all our savings into our honeymoon trip, we took him up on it.

IT DIDN'T occur to any of us how it *had* to end. Maybe if we'd told Le Blanc our names, he would have realized. But he didn't ask, and...

Well, as I guess you know by now, he had a time machine. He wanted to send me back in it because someone had to stay and operate it from the 1962 end; and he was too old, anyway. Then, too, I was handy and he didn't want news of it to get out until he was sure it worked.

He told us there was a certain amount of risk involved—that we might get stuck in time—but we decided to go anyway. We needed the money, and Eve insisted on going with me.

So we came back here—I don't know how many million years—and, as you know, we didn't get back. The time machine is still here, rusting away on some hill a few miles from where we built our house.

It's nice here. Trees and flowers like they never saw back home. But I miss Brooklyn, our friends, our little apartment we had all picked out, the job I had waiting for me.

And I don't even know how the world series turned out! They were still playing when we left.

But I wouldn't mind so much, if things had happened as we thought they would—as they were *supposed* to.

It's as my kid brother used to say; you can't ever believe anything you read.

You see, Eve turned out to be barren. God knows we tried, but it wasn't any use.

And the only company we've had all these years is this ape named Cain.

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PROBLEM IN ECOLOGY

Novelet

by Don Berry

For all his training, Nikko Varan found it hard to believe at times, that he was saving this culture from untold misery by plunging it into ruinous warfare...

MOON BETA came up over the horizon, gibbous, huge, and looking like a giant's fire-balloon. The desert sands of Procyon V caught fire beneath its muted glow; the long shadows of rocks were like plumes of red smoke trailing behind.

Nikko Varan, sometime Captain of a Terran Ecological Survey Team, stood high in the window of a rock castle overlooking the desert, watching Beta-rise bathe the sands in rose—watching and waiting.

The castle loomed up from the desert like a dark cliff, the relic of days before technology had caught up with Procyon V, of days before the great city-states of Sheplin and Mekar had grown to dominate the planet.

Varan rubbed his blue-dyed skull speculatively, a gesture of impatience. Wheeling, he strode down the long anteroom, his formal Procyon robes swishing around his legs; at its far end, opposite the window, stood a heavy, *lin*-wood conference table. Varan moved around it, swung aside one edge of the heavy wall tapestry.

"Sergeant," he called. "It's past time. Are you picking anything up?"

A non-com in the uniform of the TES looked up, his face lighted by the pale glow of the radar scope. "No, sir. These people don't understand our concept of punctu-

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ality, Captain. When they say Beta-rise, they mean anything between Beta-rise and Alpha-rise. There was a girl in Mekar City once..."

"All right, Sergeant."

"Sorry, sir." The sergeant turned his attention back to the radar sweep.

VARAN MOVED back to the window and stared out. Under the glare of the Procyon primary, the desert was harsh and angular, but the red glow of Beta turned it into softness. Rock needles spired up from the ground, mute testimony to the power of winds that swept these uninhabited regions during the yearly conjunction of Alpha and Beta, grinding everything but the hardest stone.

The desert was silent. Within the castle, he heard only the muted hum of the motor-driven radar antenna whirling on the roof. The scene was peaceful, a peace that Varan knew was planet-wide.

It almost seemed a shame to start a war.

"Captain," came the radar operator's voice. "I have two pips, from the direction of Sheplin."

"Good," said Varan.

He waited until he could see the two air-cars glinting redly under Beta. "Give them landing instructions."

THE SERGEANT fed a pre-recorded tape into the transmitter, guiding the two Sheplin vehicles to a landing just outside the castle walls. The parties that descended were met by silent groups of servants, who separated them deftly while leading them into the castle. The three Procyon natives from the officially marked Sheplin car were brought swiftly to the conference room, where Nikko Varan awaited them, impassive.

Silently, Varan regarded them, picking out individuals. The squat man would be Lenyadi, leader of the "loyal opposition" in Sheplin. The tall, thin one with the light fringe of blue hair was Tentran, head of the state religion. The third, Varan didn't recognize; probably a bodyguard.

Procyon natives were humanoid, displaying only one critical difference from Earthmen. With blue dye coating his features, Nikko Varan could pass easily.

"Gentlemen," he said in the liquid Sheplin dialect, "you are welcome."

"Where is the remainder of our party?" asked Lenyadi bluntly.

"They are being—entertained elsewhere; my business is with you. You were asked to come alone."

"A man in my position," said Lenyadi, "is ill-advised to travel alone to secret meetings with nameless persons." He did not seem inordinately

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worried at the absence of the others, Varan thought. Either Lenyadi had nothing to fear, or was putting on a fine show.

"I will be brief," said Varan.

"Please do."

"All right. Lenyadi, as leader of the minority party in Sheplin, you are anxious to become leader of the ruling party. To do this, an issue must be raised before the electorate. War with Mekar would be such an issue, provided you could prove your ability to conduct it better than the present governing party."

"No one wants war with Mekar," said Lenyadi, indifferently.

IGNORING him, Varan turned to the chief prelate. "Tentran, as Priest of the Two Moons, you would like to extend the influence of your ritual to Mekar, as well as Sheplin."

"Our differences are minor," replied Tentran carefully. "Certainly of no political significance at all."

"In other words," said Varan with amusement, "you both deny everything."

"Yes," said Lenyadi.

"Well, inasmuch as no one wants war with Mekar for *any* reason, the following discussion is purely hypothetical."

"Go ahead."

"Briefly, I have access to a weapon which would break the technological stalemate, which has existed for several hundreds of years. If, hypothetically speaking, Sheplin were to employ this weapon against Mekar, Procyon would very likely become—let us say, a unified world: One government, one religion."

"How might this hypothetical weapon work?" Lenyadi asked.

Varan described a simple, multiple-bank rocket launcher, accenting its effectiveness as a tactical weapon. For some reason, the scientists of Procyon had never investigated reaction power. Though he made no more than noncommittal expressions of interest, Nikko Varan could see that the stocky politician was very much intrigued.

"We are, of course, interested in the applied sciences, not necessarily for purposes of waging war..." Lenyadi's voice trailed off.

"Naturally not," smiled Varan.

"Thus, your—weapon, might be of some small use to our scholars. What would be the price of such a thing?"

"Twenty man-weights of lead." Roughly a ton, by Procyon measure.

"A small fortune," Lenyadi mused. "Far too much, for an item of purely academic interest."

Varan stood. There was no need to spend more time with them. They had the necessary information; the next move was theirs.

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"Possibly so," he said. "It is perhaps worth consideration, at any rate. You will be contacted one fiveday from now. Thank you."

THE THREE left, Lenyadi scowling at the implied rudeness. Varan went again to the window from which he had watched the landing. The other group was brought out from below, and there were a few minutes of low, agitated discussion as they reported their "captivity" to Lenyadi. Then both groups entered the air-cars and left.

The sergeant joined him at the window as he stood watching the departing specks.

"What was the other group?" Varan asked.

"As you figured," the sergeant said. "Squad of tough guys. They didn't like it a bit. How'd it go?"

"Fine," said Varan. "They're hooked."

"What are we going to do with a ton of lead?" asked the sergeant. "Why didn't you get something lighter, anyway?"

Varan shrugged. "They'd be suspicious of anything they didn't have to pay through the nose for. That's a lot of money on a planet low in heavy minerals."

"Yeah, I guess so. You going to make the next contact?"

"No," said Varan; "it's all routine from here on. Now I have to get the next phase going."

"Which is?"

"Convince Mekar they're about to be attacked, and sell them a weapon."

II

VARAN WASHED the blue dye from his skin, and changed back into his uniform. He would contact the Mekaran government in his own *persona*, Captain Nikko Varan of the Terran Ecological Service. He would have to convince them that Sheplin was going to attack—probably not too difficult—and offer the limited aid of the TES. All undercover, of course. It wouldn't do to have Terrans fooling in Procyon affairs too obviously; at any rate, Mekar was going to lose the war, TES aid or not. If anyone did know the Terrans had given aid to Mekar, it would simply help to reinforce the picture of the TES as an ineffectual bunch of scientists, poking around and making little graphs and charts.

Which was what TES wanted.

Varan sighed. Ecology was so complicated sometimes.

"Sergeant," he called. "Get me a ground car, will you?"

"Yes, sir. Terran or Procy?"

"Terran," said Varan, as the sergeant poked his head into the door. "What are you grinning at?"

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"You, sir," said the man. "You look pretty good bald. Head got a good shape to it."

"Get the hell out of here and get me that car!"

"Yes, *sir!*" the sergeant said, still grinning.

There were times, Varan thought ruefully, when it would be nice to have a little discipline.

BY THE TIME he had finished dressing, the groundcar was waiting for him at the door of the old castle. A few blue-dyed 'natives' were waiting for him in the courtyard, including Lieutenant Benley.

"You'd best get all the equipment back to the ship," Varan told him. "This place has served its purpose, and the Sheplin laddies just might send somebody around to see what's going on."

"All right," said Benley. "You going to MekarCity?"

"Yes," Varan said. "No driver, I think."

"How long?"

"I won't be back to the ship until Sheplin attacks MekarCity," Varan said. "Should be at least three five-days from now. I'll have to make sure MekarCity's defenses aren't quite good enough."

"That seems pretty dangerous, sir," said Benley. "If you wait until after Sheplin attacks, I mean."

Varan shrugged. "This is going to be a long war, Lieutenant. A lot of people are going to be killed."

"Seems like a shame," Benley said. "They haven't known war for three hundred years—nothing except a few minor skirmishes, anyway. Nice, happy people, high standard of living. Makes me feel like a villain."

"Yeah," said Varan. "And we *know* what we're doing. Just think what it must've been like during the early days of the Service, when they didn't know whether it would work out. Our Founding Fathers spent some sleepless nights over it, I guarantee you that."

"I suppose so," Benley said. "Still, it's a problem everybody has to face in his own way, I guess. This job is making me nervous. I *like* Procyon."

"So do I. This war will cripple both city-states, if it works out right. The survivors will be living on the level they had two hundred years ago, technologically. It's too bad, but it's necessary."

"YOU KNOW," said Benley, "when I majored in Ecology at the University, if somebody told me I'd be starting a war on a peaceful, happy planet, I'd have spit in his face. Funny, you read all the theory, and never get the implications."

"Hazards of the trade. I've got to get to the City."

"All right," Benley said.

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"We'll move the whole shooting match back to the ship and wait for you there."

"Good. You shouldn't have any trouble with the Sheplin crew. They'll try to cheat you on the lead weight, probably. Don't let 'em."

"Right. We'll see you, Captain."

Nikko Varan swung the little ground car away from the castle and headed into the hills toward MekarCity. The paved road was even and smooth under his tires, without cracks or blemishes after fifty years. It compared favorably with the best Terra could produce.

Procyon V had a good technology; there was no doubt of that. The citizens of both major powers lived lives of relative comfort. Plenty of good housing; adequate food for all; a highly complex social system...

Too complex.

Well, the war between the great powers would cut back on that.

SUDDENLY, the road heaved under him. Simultaneously there was a rolling blast like thunder, and the ground car flipped over on its side, skidding wildly into the low depression by the roadbed.

Varan had been thrown from behind the wheel at the initial blast, over to the passenger side. He struck his head heavily on the side of the door. Dazedly he heard the excited babble of Procyon voices, but couldn't make out what they were saying.

A mine, he thought confusedly, *the road was mined..*

The door on the driver's side, now directly up, was abruptly flung open and a blue Procyon face stared in at him. Wordlessly the native extended his hand down to Varan, lying on the other door. He grasped it, was pulled up through the open door and deposited on the ground beside the car. A wisp of blue smoke was coming from the engine compartment, and Varan noted it absently.

He was surrounded by a group of perhaps a dozen Procyon natives, all heavily armed. This he couldn't understand; he was certain he would have known if there had been bandit gangs roaming the hills. Then he noticed that the weapons they carried were the standard issue of the Protectors of the Peace, in both Sheplin and Mekar.

His captors eyed him with obvious hostility as one of them bound his hands behind him, saying nothing.

"What is this all..." he started.

His question was cut off as the apparent leader of the group stepped forward and caught him across the face with the back of his fist. Varan tasted a trickle of blood on his lips, warm and salty.

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The leader stepped back a pace and watched him hungrily, waiting for him to speak again. Varan did not. Finally the blue man unclenched his fist and muttered, "You have a chance to talk soon."

VARAN WAS roughly trundled into a Procy groundcar which had driven up to the side of the road after the explosion. They took off into the hills, the driver apparently following a familiar, but unmarked, pass. As they mounted the first rise, Varan glanced back and saw a crew beginning to remove the wreck of the Terran car from the center of the road. It was a well-organized party, whatever their purpose.

No more information was volunteered. For perhaps an hour they wound through the hills, finally coming upon another paved roadway which Varan did not recognize. The driver turned the groundcar onto the paving and picked up speed. Soon the tires were shrilling loudly in protest.

The Procyon primary was just below the horizon when they reached Sheplin. The first false dawn was in the sky ahead, and the squat, blocky buildings of the city were silhouetted against the yellow glow. A few tall spires reared above them, signalling the presence of a Temple of the Two Moons.

Entering the city, the groundcar slowed to a more reasonable pace. Soon they were lost in the unplanned maze of streets around the periphery. They stopped before a gray cube of a building, not noticeably any different from the other around it. Apparently they were in a warehouse district, for most of the buildings had doors that opened along their whole length, with loading ramps projecting into the street. It was still too early for any activity.

"Geddout," the leader said in guttural Terran, shoving Varan from behind.

THEY ENTERED the warehouse and ascended a flight of light-metal stairs leading to a balcony that surrounded the single huge room. A series of doors was set off the balcony, presumably leading into offices, and into one of these Varan was shoved.

The door closed behind him, and he found himself across the room from the squat, powerful Lenyadi. Flanking him were two mean-looking Procys, both with heavy handweapons thrust in their belts. They wore the uniform of Protectors of the Peace.

Lenyadi glared at him in silence before speaking.

"So," he said. "So. The Terran Captain makes a midnight trip to Mekar City, eh? And what would that be for?"

"If this is an act of aggres-

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sion against the Terran Government..."

"Let us not play any more games, Captain. What is your purpose on Procyon?"

"To study the ecology of the planet."

"Then how does it happen you are also in the weapons business?"

"I am not."

Lenyadi sighed, sounding disappointed. "Captain Varan, please use your reason. Would you be here now if I didn't know you were the one who offered to sell me the—what did you call it—rocket launcher earlier? How naive do you think we are, Captain?"

Nikko Varan said nothing, waiting to see what the point was to be. Lenyadi was right, he had underestimated either the skill or the suspicion of these people.

"Why were you going to Mekar City?" Lenyadi snapped.

"On official business of the Terran Ecological Service."

"And was your proposed transaction with Sheplin also official business?"

Varan hesitated momentarily. "No," he said. "That was—personal."

"So. Under the guise of an ecological survey, you are an arms bootlegger."

VARAN SHRUGGED. "The way they pay us, a man has to do something to make a little money."

"And how do you manage to hide arms on your ship without arousing the suspicion of your superiors?"

"I didn't offer to sell you arms," Varan pointed out. "Only the plans from which the arms could be made. It's not difficult to manage a sheaf of papers."

Lenyadi inclined his head at one of the Protectors of the Peace standing beside him. The man moved forward.

"You are lying," Lenyadi said to Varan.

"I'm not."

Lenyadi nodded his head, and the Procy guardsman threw his fist into Varan's body following with all the weight of his own frame.

Varan doubled over in pain, gasping for breath, and the guardsman stepped back.

"You are lying," came Lenyadi's expressionless voice.

"No," Varan gasped.

AGAIN THE guardsman slammed him back against the wall, following it with a stiff handed blow at the side of the neck. Varan crumpled to the floor, his bound arms twisted painfully beside him. The guard grasped him by the collar, pulled him erect. He leaned back against the wall for support.

"I don't know what you expect to accomplish by beating me up," Varan said.

"Information," Lenyadi spat. "You take me for a fool, Captain. If you were operat-

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ing independently, you could not possibly have arranged such an elaborate meeting as the one at the castle. Hit him," he said to the guard. Blood began to flow from Varan's nose again.

"Do you know what I think, Captain?" Lenyadi's voice came faintly through the red haze that surrounded him. "I think you are working with the full knowledge of your government. I want to know why."

Numbly, he shook his head. "No. Couldn't—popular opinion..."

"Hit him."

It was the last thing he heard. An explosive charge went off in his head, filling it with darkness. Just before he blacked out completely, Varan felt the cool texture of wood on his cheek. *I must be lying down,* he thought vaguely, wondering how it had happened.

III

WHEN HE awoke, and climbed unsteadily to his feet, the first thing of which Nikko Varan was aware was a massive headache. He clenched his eyes against the pain and raised one unsteady hand to his forehead. Then he realized his hands were no longer bound. He opened his eyes and stared around him in the dim light.

He was in a small room—cell, he corrected himself silently—perhaps seven feet on a side. There was a door in one wall, with a peep-hole that admitted some light from outside. Squinting through the hole, he saw that the wall opposite his door was blank. It was not large enough to give him much range of vision, and that was all he could tell. It was brightly lit outside—probably a corridor with cells leading off it.

Returning his attention to his cell, Nikko Varan saw a plate piled with a gummy mass of what apparently passed for Procyon-prisoner food. It was just in front of the door, a little to one side. Examining the door with his fingertips, he found a closed slot near the bottom, through which the food had been passed. It did not respond to his push—locked, somehow, from outside. Otherwise the cell was bare. No cot, no furniture of any kind, no sanitary facilities.

He could not tell how long he had been unconscious.

He was hungry, and sniffed suspiciously at the pile of food on the plate. Gingerly he tasted it, preparing himself for the traditional foul mess. Actually it was not bad at all, with a flavor somewhere between chalk and weak chicken soup. He finished it and sat back against the wall.

He waited.

When he estimated several hours had gone by and no one

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appeared, he got to his feet and went over to the door.

Putting his mouth to the peep-hole he shouted, "Hey! Guard!"

THERE WAS no answer, and he repeated it, louder this time.

After several minutes of silence he heard footsteps coming from off to one side. He put his eye to the hole, trying to catch a glimpse of his captor.

Suddenly another eye appeared at the hole, less than an inch from his own. It widened in surprise and disappeared abruptly.

"Get back on the other side," came a voice, obviously irritated.

Nikko Varan moved back, inordinately amused by the guard's discomfiture.

There was a sound of clickings and fumblings on the other side of the door, and the slot near the bottom opened.

"Put the plate through," the guard said.

"How can I, from over here?" Varan asked reasonably.

"Come over to the door then," the guard snapped. "Just don't try anything."

Varan shoved the plate through the slot, heard it drop to the floor on the other side. Then he heard the guard pick it up, and start off down the hall. "Hey, wait!" he called. "What about me? How do I go to the bathroom?"

The guard chuckled maliciously. "If you don't know by now, I can't tell you, Terran. Don't they teach you anything?" He laughed uproariously, hugely pleased by his own wit.

"You're a real card," Varan muttered.

"We might let you go in—oh, maybe three, four hours," said the guard. "That all right with you, Terran?"

"I guess it'll have to be," Varan said. "What am I in here for?"

"That's not my problem," came the guard's retreating voice.

Varan sat back against the wall and waited again.

BY HIS calculation it was less than two hours when the guard came back to escort him to the dingy latrine at the end of the hall. He caught his first glimpse of the world outside his cell, and it confirmed his earlier thoughts.

His cell was one of many along the hall, identical doors with their peep-holes and slits. At one end of the hall was the latrine, at the other he could see the beginning of a flight of stairs. There was no sound but the rap of their footsteps.

"Where are the other prisoners," he asked, on their way back.

"You're him," the guard said. "This place hasn't been

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used for thirty years, maybe longer. Get in," he added, opening the door.

"Wait a minute. Who do I talk to about getting out?"

The guard laughed again. "Me," he said with obvious amusement. "And I'm deaf. Get in."

Back in the cell, Varan considered the dismal prospect of an endless succession of days there. It didn't seem likely. If there were no other prisoners, then the guard's time was devoted to him alone. No society seemed likely to waste one man's entire time on a single prisoner. No, there was bound to be a change, eventually.

When his wall had fifteen day-scratches on it, he began to wonder.

HE HAD NO idea what lay above the stairs at the end of the hall. For all he knew, it might open directly into the headquarters of the Protectors of the Peace. But after two weeks of the isolation and boredom of the cell, any activity seemed better than simply waiting for something that never happened.

He had begun to make plans for overpowering the guard during the twice-daily latrine walk. He began to watch carefully, seeing if there was a pattern to his activities that might be used against him.

Then, during the fifteenth day, the guard came to his cell off regular schedule. "Get over against the wall," he grumbled, as he did every time.

Nikko Varan moved back, and the guard unlocked the heavy door.

"Come on," the guard said.

"Where?"

"Come on," the guard repeated n o n - c o m m i t a l l y. "Somebody wants a talk to you."

"Who?"

"You'll see. Get out of there."

They mounted the stairs and came out on the ground floor of a warehouse. It looked like the same one where he had had his "interview" with Lenyadi, but Varan couldn't be sure.

That it was the same was confirmed when they reached the balcony, and the guard pushed him through a door into the same office. Lenyadi was there, looking exactly as he had fifteen days before, except perhaps a little happier.

"Well, Captain Varan, have you been enjoying our hospitality?"

"Not much."

"Still pig-headed, I see. That is the Terran expression, is it not? Pig-headed? Yes." Lenyadi clasped his hands on the desk with satisfaction.

"All right," said Varan. "What's this all about?"

LENYADI looked surprised. "Why, Captain, nothing!

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You've simply been the honored guest of Sheplin for a short while. Until certain—arrangements had been completed."

"What arrangements?"

"Captain," said Lenyadi sadly. "I believe your memory has suffered. The arrangements you yourself proposed to me, some time ago."

"The rocket launcher."

"That's right, Captain, the rocket launcher. Your—shall we say representative?—contacted me after one five-day, as agreed. All painted blue, too."

That would have been Benley, Varan thought.

"So?" he asked.

"We came to an agreement; we bought the plans from him; and have had factories going night and day for the past two five-days, building."

"And if you intended going through with the arrangement, why was I held a prisoner?"

"Obviously, since you were headed toward Mekar when my men—found you, you intended something in the way of a betrayal. A warning, perhaps. Another weapon sale. I don't know. But it seemed better to know where you were, until we were prepared."

"And now you're prepared."

"More than prepared. We attacked Mekar last night."

SO, IT HAD started, Varan thought. According to schedule. But if Mekar were wiped out easily, the war would have served no purpose. In order to fulfill the TES plan, *both* Mekar and Sheplin would have to be vitiated.

Varan shuddered. It was one thing for thousands of people to die for the ultimate good of the planet; it was another to have them sacrificed without point. If Sheplin won this war without breaking themselves in expenditure, the whole thing was ruined.

And Captain Nikko Varan would have the blood of all the slaughtered Mekarans on his hands, needlessly. It was not a pleasant thought. He became aware that Lenyadi was still speaking.

"...but it still hasn't been explained to my satisfaction just what part the Terran Government is playing in this." Suddenly his voice, which had been genial, hardened. "I mean to find out, Captain. From you. I have been occupied with the preparations for war until now. But I mean to find out."

"I've told you," Varan said. "The Terran Government knows nothing about my activities here." Which, very literally, was true—but misleading.

"You're lying again," said Lenyadi flatly, and Varan had a swift picture of the relentless working over he had received from the Procy guardsman before.

Lenyadi had been leaning

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forward over the desk as he spoke. Now he leaned back, relaxed, and his voice became almost conversational again. "We've taken the castle where you and I first met as a command post," Lenyadi said. "We'll go there. Perhaps you will be a little more cooperative under more—intensive questioning."

THEY LEFT the warehouse, and Varan blinked uncomfortably against the strong daylight. His weeks in the dark of the cell had weakened his resistance to bright light, and he found his eyes watering painfully.

Though it was the middle of the morning, the Sheplin city was grimly quiet. Small knots of people were on the streets, and they looked up without curiosity as the car in which he rode whizzed past. Once they passed a long column of armored trucks heading toward the city gates, and Varan noted they were all mounted with rocket launchers built from the plans he—or TES—had provided. From the quantity, Lenyadi had not been exaggerating when he said the factories had been working day and night. It was still amazing that they had been able to accomplish so much in such a short time, a testimony to the high technological level the city-states had achieved.

Strange, Varan mused. It was the technology of Procyon V that the TES was attacking, and that technology made possible its own downfall. With luck, he reserved to himself. If, and only if, the Mekaran people could find an adequate way to defend themselves.

Ideally, he supposed, it might be possible to lower the standard of living of a culture without loss of life. Practically, he had never known it to happen. And yet, when he was receiving his training as a Team Captain, there had never been any mention of human beings dying, blue-skinned or otherwise.

Graphs and charts and theory and the complex mathematical formulations that governed TES operation—his training had been in terms of these abstract quantities. Not the rolling blast of rockets landing in a residential area; not the screams of the dying and the mutilated; not the shredded flesh and shattered bone and flattened citys that shouted "War!"

War was a sub-class on a chart labeled "Regulatory Mechanisms."

THE FOUNDATIONS for TES had been laid seven centuries before, in the middle of the twentieth century. Even in those days, before man had even reached the planets of his own system, some few had begun to look upon mankind as a member of an ecological community. In

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the first years, the emphasis had been upon his destruction and alteration of the natural communities in which he found himself. Then, gradually, it had come to be realized that man himself formed an ecosystem, subject to the same natural laws of development and selection that governed any other group of ecologically inter-related organisms.

And in the broad pattern of development, War served; its function in the ecology of man went far beyond the obvious control it exerted over overpopulation. In a paradoxical way, Nikko Varan thought, War made it possible for man to survive...

But the cruel, physical fact of death was made no more pleasant by that knowledge. It was no wonder so many TES Captains cracked; the weight of responsibility rested heavy on their shoulders...

IV

THE GROUNDCAR had left the Sheplin city now and was speeding along the open road. Periodically they passed lines of rocket-carrying trucks moving in the same direction, toward Mekar.

Finally they came into sight of the gray stone castle that now served as a Sheplin command post.

Nikko Varan wondered briefly if his men would be looking for him, and decided not. He was on his own, now. They had not expected to hear from him while he was in MekarCity, and they knew he would be there until after the first attack. When he did not return to the ship after the attack, they would wait a reasonable time, and then lift. For the sake of one man—even the Captain of the Team—they could not afford to risk the ship in a national war. They would regretfully enter his name on the list of Team Captains killed on duty, but he could expect no help from them.

Which meant he was stranded on Procyon V for the rest of his life, however long that might be, since TES itself could hardly claim responsibility for a man who had given a city the weapons to wage war against another city.

Hazard of the trade, he thought. If you made a mistake, it was on you. Nobody knew you, officially.

One thing he could do. Try to see that the war between Sheplin and Mekar wasn't entirely a waste of life...

ABRUPTLY, Varan slumped forward in the seat, banging his head against the instrument panel. Startled, the guard in the seat behind him leaned forward, ready for trouble.

"What's wrong?" Lenyadi

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demanded. "What's wrong with him?"

"I don't know," said the guard dubiously. "He just fell over."

"Well, find out," Lenyadi snapped, leaning forward to look.

The guard grasped Varan's shoulder and shook him.

"Hey, what the matter? You sick?"

Varan made a gurgling sound in his throat.

"I think he's sick," the guard said plaintively, as if disclaiming all responsibility. He leaned farther over the front seat, reaching out his hand to lift Varan's eyelid.

Suddenly Varan's elbow came up and back, connecting solidly with the guard's jaw; howling with pain, the man fell back. Varan twisted quickly, following through the punch with his elbow and grabbed the butt of the hand-weapon as the guard fell.

"All right," he said, pointing the muzzle at the driver. "Keep your speed up. Past the castle and up into the hills. The second you slack up, you better start looking for a new head."

The driver said nothing, but darted quick glances at the gun muzzle out of the corner of his eye.

"You won't make it," said Lenyadi from the back seat.

Varan was turned sidewavs, keeping his eyes on both the back seat and the driver. "I don't think you'll call anybody from the castle," he said. "I suspect you're too fond of your health."

"You won't make it," Lenyadi repeated, but there was little conviction in his voice.

The groundcar came closer to the dull gray building.

"I mean it," said Varan, his voice low. "Slow down the smallest fraction and you're dead."

THE DRIVER kept his speed up. They were hailed at the first guard station on the road. Glancing back when they had passed, Varan saw the guard standing in the middle of the road, indecisively, scratching his head.

"Your guards aren't too alert," he grinned at Lenyadi.

Lenyadi shrugged.

He's a good actor, Varan thought. Silently, he debated carrying Lenyadi into Mekar with him, and turning him over to the Mekaran government. But as far as he could see, Lenyadi was almost entirely in charge of the war. On Sheplin's side, at any rate, it seemed to be organized around the single figure of the squat politician. It was possible that the whole thing would collapse without Lenyadi's guiding hand; whatever else the man might be, he would have to be a strong leader in order to mobilize an army on such short notice. No, it seemed that Lenyadi was necessary.

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"When you get around the next bend," Varan said to the driver, "Stop the car and get out."

Silently, the driver did so.

"All right, Lenyadi; you and your bully boy out, too."

"What are you going to do?"

"My business. For the moment, be glad I'm leaving you alive." Walk back down the road."

WHEN THE three had gone perhaps a hundred yards, Varan swung behind the wheel and sent the ground car hurtling along the road again. He kept the turbine whining and screaming, even around the turns. The tires shrieked their protest, and several times he felt only an uneasy balance as he rounded a sharp corner, but he did not let up.

The miles rolled away behind him, relentlessly.

He stopped only once, pulling beneath a grove of trees when he caught a glimpse of a low flying aircar behind him. From his concealed vantage point he watched it fly past, noting the jury-rigged rocket racks hung beneath its stubby wings.

He stayed concealed until the plane came back, a few short minutes later. They were too close to Mekar, he thought. The pilot didn't want to risk losing his plane to Mekar fire. When the aircar had buzzed back over the hill in the direction of Sheplin, Nikko Varan put his car back on the road, and soon was in sight of the besieged MekarCity.

It was built along roughly the same lines as the Sheplin city, squat gray buildings surrounded by a not-very-formidable wall. The Procyon natives had never developed an art form out of architecture, seeming perfectly content with the cubical structures that made up the city. Varan thought absently he might look into that facet of the culture some time, before remembering that the culture would not be the same after this war.

Not the same at all.

THERE WERE several large gaps in the city wall, where the first Sheplin barrage had penetrated, and there seemed to be a furious activity around these gaps, probably repair work. He noted with interest that the unwieldy, solid-projectile cannon were all directed toward the eastern plain, facing Sheplin. Probably the Mekarans expected a land attack sometime that night.

The city itself was set in a roughly cup-shaped plain, and Varan could see no way to cross that flat land without being seen. He decided to wait for nightfall, and try to make his way in either through one of the rocket gaps or through a gate on the other side. Probably the gates

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would be heavily guarded on all sides, and he decided one of the explosion-caused holes would be the most likely possibility.

He drove the little ground-car off the road, as far up into the hill as he could go. Finally it refused to go any farther, its wheels spinning uselessly in the loose underbrush. He settled down to wait for night to come. He drowsed, waiting.

HE WAS WAKENED with a start by the sound of heavy, rolling fire from the city's defending cannon. Climbing to the top of the hill in the dusk, he saw the muzzle flashes standing out brightly against the dark walls.

Thin, luminous rocket trails were arcing over the walls, landing within the city in a series of dull crump! crump! crump! sounds. A steady rhythm of explosions came to him across the plain. With his eyes he followed the rocket trails back to their source.

Beta was just rising, the smoky red light casting long, erratic shadows. Vaguely illumined by the red moon, lines of rocket-carrying trucks wove in and out in an endlessly-shifting, sinuous pattern. They were coming up in a long line from somewhere to the rear. When they reached the front line, they turned broadside to the city and fired the multiple banks of rockets while still moving, presenting a difficult target for the clumsily-aimed cannon on the walls. Nikko Varan had a moment of brief admiration for Lenyadi's tactics.

Gradually the front line of rocket trucks moved closer to the city, emboldened by their light losses.

If he could get into the city, reach some voice in the Mekaran government, he might still be able to even the battle up, simply by his greater knowledge of military strategy.

Panting, he made his way down the rocky, brushy hill, and stopped at the edge of the circular plain, to the south of the city.

The wall was still nearly a half mile away, over totally coverless ground. If someone on the walls spotted him running across the plain, he would be finished. Once inside the city, his white, Terran face would be enough protection.

Unless, he thought bitterly, the Mekarans knew where the Sheplin armies had gotten the rocket launchers. It was a chance he had to take.

STEELING himself for the fire that might come at any minute, he began to run low across the plain. His feet pounded the dry ground; and after a few hundred yards, his breath was already coming in short, harsh gasps.

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There was no fire from the city walls, apparently all their attention was directed to the east and the lines of rocket-launching trucks in their snake dance. Nikko Varan reached the wall and lay still against it, regaining his breath. Then he began to inch his way along in the dusky red light toward the gap nearest him. Attaining it, he scrambled hastily over the rubble that still cluttered it, and was in MekarCity.

Inside the walls, the city was a vision out of a nightmare. Flames leaped up all around, casting crazily-dancing shadows. Above him, on the walls, the cannon added their heavy thumping to the din that suddenly surrounded him. The red light of Beta made the whole scene appear as if drenched in blood.

There was surprisingly little panic. Knots of people ran past him, shouting, but not in fear. Groups of medical workers were tending to the wounded; long lines of men were passing shells for the cannon down the narrow streets.

Several times, as he began picking his way toward the central Government Dome, people turned to stare curiously at his white face, but none showed malice. Apparently they had not heard that the Terrans had armed the Sheplin enemy.

He was astonished at the ordered discipline of the Procyon natives; they had been taken completely by surprise, but had rallied incredibly well. He doubted that they could have done much better, even if they had been warned. They seemed prepared and organized more than he could possibly have predicted.

AS HE DREW nearer the Central Dome, the din around Varan abated slightly. The fires were less frequent now, which made no more sense to him than the organization of the people. From the hill, he had seen the rockets fall directly into the center of the city, seen their flashes and heard the echo of the explosions rolling faintly across the plain.

There was a brilliant flash above him, and Nikko Varan instinctively dropped flat. The roar that came to him was thunderous, but there was no concussion.

Looking incredulously up, he saw the last light fade from the rocket explosion. It had been headed directly for the Central Dome, and it had been stopped in mid-flight, and exploded.

Unbelieving, Varan knew there was only one explanation. There was a Dyer Screen over the center of the city. A small one, probably, since its field did not extend as far as the walls.

A Screen of the size carried on TES ships.

He scrambled to his feet

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and started running again. As he rounded the next corner, he ran headlong into another figure.

"Captain!" said the familiar voice of Lieutenant Benley, "Where you been? Lord—you look like hell; here, let me help you."

"No, I'm all right," Varan snapped. "What's going on here? There's a Dyer Screen operating."

"Couldn't think of anything else on short notice, Captain. The Merakans had to have some kind of defense against the rockets. We took the screen off the ship. Where you been?" he repeated.

"Our friend Lenyadi had some foolish notion I might be trying to trick him, so he locked me up."

"FIGURED AS much," said the Lieutenant shortly. "Listen, let's get back to the Dome; we can contact the ship from there." He turned and began to trot down the street, and Varan followed him.

"How'd you know anything was wrong?" Varan panted. "You didn't expect me back before the attack anyway."

"A hunch," said Benley. "Kind of funny, when you think about it. You remember you told me the Sheplins would try to cheat on the lead weight? They didn't; they handed it over smiling. Also, Lenyadi didn't ask for any guarantee that the rockets would work. A lot of little things that didn't mean much, but they just struck me wrong."

They reached the Central Dome, and the Radar-Sergeant came dashing down the steps.

"Contact the ship," Benley said. "Bring it in on the west side of the city, opposite the rockets."

"Yes, *sir!*" said the Sergeant. "We getting out of here?"

"Yes."

"That don't hurt my feelings any," he said happily. He turned and ran back up the stairs into the Dome. Varan and Benley followed, more slowly.

"So I came into the city to see you," Benley continued, "and found out you hadn't even been here. We figured something had gone wrong, and started organizing the people for the attack." He shrugged. "It came, right on schedule."

"Yeah," said Varan, "Lenyadi didn't miss a bet. How much damage is there?"

"It's not as bad as it looks," Benley said. "Mostly around the walls."

"Think they'll be able to hold out?"

"Yes, sir," said Benley. "They're already preparing counter-attacks on Sheplin. They'll hold. It looks like a long war, Captain."

"Good," Varan said. "Our

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job's done, then. Let's get out of here."

THE TES SHIP lifted shortly before dawn, with a full complement. There had been no losses to TES personnel.

"Not even the goddam Captain," grumbled the Radar-Sergeant, loudly enough for Nikko Varan to hear easily. "Seems like we could do better than that."

"Maybe you'll have better luck next trip, Sergeant," Varan said.

"Maybe, sir," said the Sergeant, dubiously. "I doubt it; you got a charmed life."

"Nobody has, in this business," said the Captain. "Suppose you go get me some coffee, will you?"

Varan sank into the deep couch of the Lounge gratefully. "You know," he said to Benley, "I haven't had a bath since this thing started."

"I know, sir," said Benley seriously. "I can smell you from here."

"You don't have to agree so damn fast," grumbled Varan. He sat for a long moment, lost in thought.

"I wonder if we'll ever get past that stage, Lieutenant," he said quietly.

"What stage, Captain?"

Varan gestured to the planet they had just left. "War. Violence. Sometimes I wonder if we take too much into our hands."

"I DON'T think so, Captain. If I did, I couldn't live with myself. In a sense, we don't do anything that wouldn't be done anyway. We just try to do it at the right time, that's all."

"I know. I'm tired. But it all looks different when you're dealing with living, dying people, instead of math."

"It works, Captain. That's the justification; it works."

"I know. Lieutenant, would you leave me alone for a little while?"

"Certainly, Captain. Call if you want anything."

I want something, all right, thought Varan bitterly. *A little certainty is what I want.* Maybe seven hundred years wasn't long enough to be sure. When you deal with the fates of whole races, you want to be sure, awfully sure.

But Benley was right, of course; it did work. Man, like all other creatures living in cooperation, was subject to natural laws of regulation.

Laws which operated to insure the constant forward movement of the ecosystem. In many ways, Varan realized, an ecosystem could be considered an entity in itself, composed of individuals as the individual is composed of cells.

AND IN any organism, the regulatory mechanisms are always at work. Any change in the environment of

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an organism cause them to come into play. With the individual it was simpler. Too much heat, and the sweat glands came into play; too much CO_2 in the bloodstream, and the respiratory muscles are stimulated. Any organism maintained its existence in a fluctuating *environment*, through the ceaseless activity of the regulatory mechanisms natural to it. Cultures, too, had their means of regulating themselves; as unconsciously as the human body adapts to change, so does an ecosystem.

Just as men began to realize this, in the middle of the twentieth century, they had come to realize the danger of a technology so high that the individual member cannot cope with it. They found that this danger, like excess heat, had its own natural regulations.

When a culture becomes too complex for its inhabitants to adjust to, it is cut back to manageable size. The number of elements are reduced to a point where the individual can once again handle them. Very simply, the ecological purpose of War is to reduce the standard of living. If that standard became too high before the culture was ready for it, the individual could no longer cope with the simple physical facts of existence; the pattern that emerged then was not pleasant. It had happened once on Terra, even before spaceflight, in a country called America, which Nikko Varan knew only vaguely.

A WAR HAD been fought, a huge war, but it had failed to lower the standard of living in that country, noticeably, for the first time in history. Instead of halting, for a moment of breath in the relentless movement toward mechanization, they had gone onward unchecked. The technology had become too complex, too fast—too bulky for the individual to control. And he had responded by mechanizing himself, forcing himself into rigid behavior patterns, simply in order to deal with the incredibly complex society he had forced on himself.

The individual spent the greater part of his energies in adapting to the complexity of his culture. It was not a condition that favored the growth of the human individual. And the welfare of the ecosystem called Man depended on the growth of its members, as do all ecosystems.

Varan sighed.

That was what he had been sent to prevent on Procyon V. The war between Mekar and Sheplin would deplete both their resources; eventually, both would be forced back to a simpler mode of living. Then would begin the long struggle to build back up again. It would take long; but in that time, the social devel-

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opment of the people would grow, too. And if technology outpaced social development again in the future—it would be cut back again, one way or another. War, or something else—but it would come.

VARAN THOUGHT bitterly of the individuals who must die, in order that other individuals might grow into maturity. The laws of nature were not kind. At least TES could mediate a little, see that the wars were fought at the right time, and with weapons which would not destroy the planet.

That much they could do, but no more. The laws of an ecology are not ruthless, either, but they are implacable. One way or another, it would happen; and the only thing man could do was try to nudge it a little, one way or the other.

Varan turned his thoughts away from the rubble-laden streets of MekarCity, and saw the sergeant standing in the doorway, watching him silently.

"You brought the coffee, Sergeant? Thanks."

"Yes, sir. You looked—preoccupied, so I didn't bother you."

"Yes. Yes, I guess I was, Sergeant."

"Do you mind if I ask what you were thinking, sir?"

"Just wondering, Sergeant; just wondering where we're going to play God tomorrow."

"God, sir?"

"Never mind, Sergeant. A passing thought, that's all. Just working out a little problem in ecology of my own."

☆

The Reckoning

This is being typed December 4th; the polls on Issue #34 are hereby closed as we record the returns to date. So figure that your votes on the February issue (#35) will have to reach me by February 3rd or 4th in order to be counted.

Here's how issue #34 came out:

1. Lonely Stars (Nichols)	3.18
2. Cloak & Stagger (Dickson)	3.33
3. Gun For Grandfather (Busby)	3.72
4. Force of Mortality (Silverberg)	3.81
5. Starobin (St. Clair)	4.18
6. Professor From Pyjm (Tucker & Cox, Jr.)	4.27
7. Last Meeting Place (Scortia)	4.81
8. Round Peg (Hahn)	5.72

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SCIENCE FICTION ALMANAC

The dates listed are those that appeared on the magazines, rather than the dates when they appeared on the newsstands.

MARCH

1923: (marginal) *Weird Tales,* Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; monthly; Edwin Baird, editor.

1933: Final issue of *Astounding Stories of Super Science* Vol. 12, No. 1.

1938: *Astounding Stories* becomes *Astounding Science Fiction.*

1939: *Science Fiction,* Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; bi-monthly; Charles D. Hornig, editor.
(marginal) *Unknown,* Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; monthly; John W. Campbell, Jr., editor.

1940: *Super Science Stories,* Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; bi-monthly; Frederik Pohl, editor.
Cosmic Stories, Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; bi-monthly; Donald A. Wollheim, editor.

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1941: *Super Science Stories* becomes *Super Science Novels Magazine.*

1942: (marginal) *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* re-issued by Popular Publications; pulp size; quarterly; Alden H. Norton, editor; Mary Ganedinger, associate editor.

(marginal) Final issue of *Stirring Science Stories,* (Vol. 2, No 1; large size, flat, saddle-stitched format.)

1948: (marginal) *Fantastic Novels* revived; pulp size; bi-monthly; Alden H. Norton, editor; Mary Ganedinger, associate editor.

1951: (marginal) *10 Story Fantasy,* Vol. 1, No. 1.; pulp size; Donald A. Wollheim, editor. (Designated as a quarterly publication, but no further issue appeared.)

1952: *If,* Vol. 1, No. 1; digest size; bi-monthly; Paul Fairman, editor.

Jack O'Sullivan now editor of *Planet Stories.*

1953: *Science Fiction +,* Vol. 1, No. 1; large size; slick format; monthly; Hugo Gernsback, editor; Sam Moskowitz, associate editor.

Tops In Science Fiction, Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; quarterly; Jack O'Sullivan, editor. (Anthology of material appearing in *Planet Stories.)*

(marginal) *Fantasy Magazine,* Vol. 1, No. 1; digest size; bi-monthly; Lester del Rey, editor.

1957: *Saturn,* Vol. 1, No. 1; digest size; bi-monthly; Robert C. Sproul, editor; Donald A. Wollheim, editorial consultant.

Space Science Fiction, Vol. 1, No. 1; (Republic) digest size; bi-monthly (but dated Spring); Lyle Kenyon Engel, editor.

(marginal) *Tales of the Frightened,* Vol. 1, No. 1; digest size; bi-monthly; (but dated Spring); Lyle Kenyon Engel, editor.

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1926: *Amazing Stories,* Vol. 1, No. 1.; large size; monthly; Hugo Gernsback, editor; T O'Conor Sloane, associate editor.

1931: (marginal) *Miracle Science and Fantasy Stories,* Vol. 1, pulp size; bi-monthly; Elliot Dold, editor.

1939: Final issue of *Dynamic Science Stories* (Vol. 1, No. 2).

1941: Robert W. Lowndes now editor of *Future Fiction* and *Science Fiction Quarterly* (with Issue No. 3).
(marginal) *Uncanny Stories,* Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; Robert O. Erisman, editor. (Designated as a bi-monthly publication, but no further issues appeared.

1943: *Future Fantasy and Science Fiction* becomes *Science Fiction Stories.*

And Now The News...

This time it isn't a trial balloon announcement, or a vague hope; it's definite: *SCIENCE FICTION STORIES becomes a monthly publication with the May 1958 issue!*

A year ago, we asked for your votes on two questions: 1) monthly publication 2) serials. Your response on both was overwhelmingly YES!

In the May, 1958 issue of SCIENCE FICTION STORIES you will find the opening installment of a new, book-length novel by L. Sprague de Camp; title: "The Tower of Zanid". Better reserve your issue today, because I have a feeling that this novel will be very well liked.

Another reason: we have an article by Richard H. Macklin on satellites. Not just a collection of snips from technical journals. Of course, there's technical information in it; that goes without saying. But the approach is what makes it just right for a science fiction magazine, and you'll get the idea from the title: "Satellites in Fact and Fiction". Just how close did science fictionists come to foreseeing today's reality? You'll find the answer in the May 1958 SCIENCE FICTION STORIES.

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Final issue of *Astonishing Stories* (Vol. 4, No. 4).
Final numbered issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly* (No. 10).

1944: Final issue of *Captain Future* (Vol. 6, No. 2).

1951: *Fantastic Story Quarterly* becomes *Fantastic Story Magazine.*

1953: *Amazing Stories* becomes digest size.
(marginal) Final issue of *Avon Science Fiction and Fantasy Reader.*

1954: James Quinn now editor of *If.*

1955: Final issue of *Fantastic Story Magazine* (Vol. 8, No. 2).

1953: *Rocket Stories;* Vol. 1, No. 1; digest size; bi-monthly; Wade Kaempfert, editor.

Looking Ahead

A new author, T. H. Mathieu, leads off our next issue with a novelet entitled "Mouse". You may recall hearing that a pair of rabbits once got loose in Australia — and nearly wrecked a continent! In this tale, we have a mouse-like creature which is far more dangerous. After all, rabbits don't bite people as a rule — and even when they do, it's usually just a matter of a wound to be treated against infection. But the bite of this creature was fatal in twenty seconds!

Rather than strain the crystal ball, which usually looks rather cloudy this far in advance, let me just add that I'm looking ahead to your letters, postal cards, and coupons. The more votes there are to tally up, the more nearly representative those final reckoning score-cards are going to be.

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DOWN TO EARTH

LETTERS to science fiction editors are not tossed into the wastebasket or dropped into a drawer for some vague future reference; no, they're all read if the editor can possibly puzzle them out. Comments on stories, artwork, etc., get careful attention; and when the reader has listed the stories in his order of preference or given any clue as to which stories he prefers, these votes are tabulated on our master chart of reader-reaction to the issue. Whether your epistle bristles with wrath, or praises us so heartily that we suspect a forthcoming touch for a loan or some special favor, we meditate upon it. And when we find something which seems like a consensus, we try to act upon it.

Needless to say we like typewritten letters best. They're easiest to read (usually); but an interesting letter in legible handwriting will be cheerfully transcribed for the printers. One favor we do implore: if you type your letter, type it double-space if you can—but at any rate, *please* use only one side of the sheet. Our printers will accept letters typed single-space if there aren't too many of them at one time, but they won't stand for copy on both sides of the sheet. (I'm not sure whether it's superstition, Union Laws, or key-ins to engram-like traumas—but at any rate printers do not turn mss. pages over. I heard of one who did, once, but they wouldn't dig him up just to let me see what he looked like.)

You've no idea what a traumatic experience it is for the editor to receive a fascinating, neatly-typed letter which he has to *re-type* before he can use it. After all, the U. S. constitution particularly forbids cruel and unusual punishments whatever the offense!

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BRACE YOURSELF, IKE!

Dear RAWL:

Just because you're an editor is no reason to let your writers give you a rawl dea.

All right, sue me; but Al Riley claimed he was addicted to bad puns, so I submit for his inspection the above stinkeroo.

Just who does Issac Asimof think he is, anyway? The way he beefs, you'd think his name was easy to spell. Even though I greatly admire Dr. Assimov's literary skill (which is far from dubious), I can't approve of his declaring war on any editor who lets a misspelling of the name *Izaak Asemuv* slip past him. What's more, Dr. Azimov carries on his verbal sallies with a most unseemly air of levity —that is, in a way which can only be described as tongue-in-cheek. This will certainly never do. After all, we wouldn't want the good doctor to bite his tongue; if he did, he might not be able to say his own name. It's awful hard for a person with a sore tongue to say—"Isakk Aazomiv".

(Afterthought: Since Dr. Asimovv's name is misspelled so often, why doesn't he write under a nice simple pen name like Vomisa Caasi?)

Congratulations on going bimonthly (at last!); also on reviving "The Reckoning." If we get a vote for each story, I mark my ballot eight times for "Cloak And Stagger". Don't pay any attention, though—I'm addicted to GoRDickson's writing.

Back to the attack on the mad biochemist of Boston! In his rude letter in *Future* No. 34, Isac Asimoov calls attention to a definition of science fiction which (the modest doctor makes very clear) he wrote. It proclaims SF to be "that branch of literature which is concerned with the impact of scientific advance upon human beings." This was his contribution to the discussion of a definition for SF. Any interested reader can look on page 96 of *Future* No. 33, where Bob Olsen deals with a quite similar definition by showing that it would make such novels as *"Arrowsmith"* and *"The Caine Mutiny"* science fiction. Try that on for psize, Dr. Asimmov!

While we're on the subject of the definition of SF, I would like to say that Mr. Olsen's definition, though excellent, is not quite perfect. He said, I believe, that it is "A narrative about an imaginary invention or discovery..." That was the crux of it, anyway. But would that cover Fred Brown's *"What Mad Universe?"* or his *"Martians, Go Home?"* Come to think of it, would it cover any story concerning the invasion of Earth by aliens? Of course, you could stretch a point and say that such invasion would constitute a dis-

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covery—namely, that said aliens exist, or that there is intelligent life on *Other Worlds.* Oops! Sorry!

GREG GABBARD,
601 Cannon St.,
New Boston, Texas.

P.S.: The sight of my name in print inspired me, and I submit the following definition:

Science Fiction: A narrative which could not happen at the present state of scientific (or other) development, although it is based upon presently known and accepted facts or conjectures.

Nearly all great men have had their little, very individual crochets—some amusing, some bewildering, some sadistic, and so on. Dr. Asimov has chosen a particularly harmless one, which is also amusing; so don't you think that we can afford this small tribute to genius—suffer with him when you see his name misspelled in print? No need to overplay it by deliberate distortions of the spelling; the whole point is that it happens often enough through inadvertence.

I'd question the word "present" in your proposed definition, of science fiction, since to accept it would mean that, almost any year, numerous stories which were clearly science fiction at the time they were first published must be dropped from the rolls. For

[*Turn Page*]

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example, H. G. Wells' "The Land Ironclads" does not seem to be science fiction today; yet it was indeed science fiction when he wrote it, and remains a bright exhibit for those who make a point of the element of prophecy in science fiction.

ANOTHER DEFINITION

Dear Sir:

After reading the article "Wanted: A Definition For Science Fiction" and the letters written in response, I felt that I too had something to say. After much debate and crossing out of words, I have my definition of science fiction.

Science Fiction: a type of literature based on a situation in the present or future (occasionally in the past) in which the character or characters have the assistance of a technology, psychology, alien like form, or other type of unusual assistance unlike some manner that which we are accustomed to. By using these conditions, or acting as a result of them, the characters resolve their problems, which themselves may be a direct result of said conditions."

I use "problem" here to mean any sort of thwarting of will, conflict, or any situation which presents a difficulty. In other words, the author takes his character(s), puts him in a given situation, gives him certain gadgets; psychological training, inhibitions, or differences; an alien or two to pose a problem, complicate a situation, give assistance, or merely add local color. The author does anything he wishes with the character in the way of unusual circumstances. The author then proceeds to have his people solve their problem by using what they have. His characters act according to their environment, which is different in some manner from the factual present as we know it.

A definition for science fiction is not hard to find, but a real stinker is the difference between science fiction and fantasy. A good long article on this would be interesting.

A word about scientific accuracy. A person who reads sf for scientific accuracy is up against a blank wall. Naturally common-knowledge scientific facts should not be abused, and aren't. But let someone have a loophole in his explanation of the workings of interstellar drive and he's sunk. I read sf with an open mind, although I have a good knowledge of physics, and I don't pick out all the mistakes in theory. Anything is possible tomorrow.

BARBARA W. LEX,
North Shimmerville Road,
Clarence, New York

The draft is a bit rough, but I think this definition is on the

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right track. I'd quibble, though, about "unusual assistance"; a message from the "spirit world" could be considered "unusual assistance", you know—but would not be acceptable in science fiction.

One reason *why* differentiating between science fiction and fantasy is so difficult is that we're still struggling over the definition for science fiction. Obviously, it has to be of such a nature and precision that many fantasy tales, now loosely lumped together with science fiction, would clearly be segregated.

From: A reader
To: Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor, *Future Science Fiction*
Subj: Discrepancy; outstanding
Ref: (a) Issue #33, FSF, "Cat O' Nine Tales", Para 1, line 12

1. Reference (a) stated a 30 *millimeter* Pistol was used.
2. *Please!*
3. One inch=25.4mm. Ergo, 30mm=1.181 inches, or, 118.1 caliber.
4. Recoil of such a pistol, even had the user been able to lift it, would have sent his (Lt. LeFarge's) hand back in time.
5. Otherwise story was best issue.

JAMES J. OGGERINO
TSgt. USMC

From: Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor, *Future Science Fiction*
To: Reader Oggerino
Subj: Discrepancy noted
Ref: (a) Issue #33, FSF, "Cat O' Nine Tales", Para 1, line 12

1. Reference (a) stated a 30 *millimeter* pistol was used.
2. Author Scortia made special phone call to Editor to advise him of error, and ask if it could be changed.
3. Editor regretfully informed author that it was too late to make any further changes in Issue #33 of FSF.
4. Editor promised author to inform readers that author's error was made inadvertently in the process of typing mss. to meet deadline, and is not to be taken as ignorance on part of author.
5. Editor promised to further inform readers that he himself did not notice error.

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6. Editor is grieved at his own ignorance, and author's mishap, but shares author's pleasure that Reader Oggerino found "Cat O' Nine Tales" (otherwise) the best story in the issue.

AGREEABLE ATTEMPT

Dear. Mr. Lowndes,

I never did have sense enough to keep my mouth shut, and now is no time to start. So, although Mr. Olsen has been reading stf for a quarter of a century, as well as writing stf classics, while I have been reading the stuff for closer to one-twentieth of a century, and writing it not at all, I will take it upon myself to find fault with his definition of science fiction.

In the first place, I don't like his use of the words *"invention,"* and *"discovery."* As first witnesses I will call Shirley Jackson's "One Ordinary Day, With Peanuts;", "Bulkhead," by Theodore Sturgeon, and "The Witness," by Eric Frank Russell. Admittedly, the first may be closer to fantasy, but then no one has defined that, either. None of these three stories are about inventions or discoveries. Both *do* appear, but as atmosphere, rather than plot.

I could name, probably, thousands of sf stories without naming one that uses as its main plot an invention or discovery. Most modern day sf uses instead *people*, their effect on the world of the future, past, or what have you, and the effect of the world on them. In most true science fiction the main plot is centered around a *problem*, which was either caused, or will be solved, by science, or scientific principles.

I offer, then, my definition of science fiction:

> *science fiction:* Any story in which a problem has been caused by science, or solved by the use of science.

In order to separate this from the modern books such as *"Space Medicine," "The Atomic Age Opens,"* etc., lets add the word "ficticious." Furthermore, the phrase, "such science being the logical predecessor to the science of today, though not necessarily being possible in terms of present-day scientific knowledge." We then arrive at:

> *science fiction:* Any ficticious story in which a problem has been caused by science, or is solved by the use of science, such science being a logical derivation from the science of today, though not necessarily being possible in terms of present-day scientific knowledge.

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How does that agree with you?

ROGER EBERT,
410 East Washington,
Urbana, Illinois

I'd like to see more discussion on these proposed definitions as well as more definitions. Of course, if we get one we can all agree upon, then we're in the position of the mice who decided to bell the cat. We'll have obtained the bell...

AN EAR FOR STYLE

Dear Bob;

In the December *Satellite Science Fiction,* Sam Moskowitz once more accuses me of being "style-deaf." *Satellite* declined to publish my reply —pleading lack of space—but I would like to get it on the record somewhere; may I use your pages?

"Style-deaf" is a coined word which I used, in my review of *"The Blind Spot,"* by Hall and Flint (*"In Search of Wonder"*, p. 14), to mean "unable to distinguish good style from bad." Moskowitz gives it a slightly different meaning: "unable to distinguish one author's style from another's."

In my sense of the word, Moskowitz himself is partially style-deaf; otherwise he couldn't write a phrase like "an article no intelligent mind could stomach." *(Op. cit.,* chapter 17, "Microcosmic Moskowitz.")

I do not know of any adult, literate person with all his faculties who is style-deaf in Moskowitz's sense. Such a person would have to be unable to tell short sentences from long, harsh from soft, fluent from stumbling. The idea is absurd, and Moskowitz knows it; but he is stuck with the logical results of his evidence.

Let's look at the evidence, and the logic. Moskowitz

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makes the following points in his argument:

1. That in the chapter on Bradbury, I described Bradbury's style as similar to Robert Nathan's.

> Nothing of the sort; I merely used a quotation from Benet which seemed to me apposite; the quotation happened to be about Nathan, and I said so. "...a style at once delicate, without rancor, and clear as water or air." This is praise, not classification.

2. "I think there can be very little doubt that Knight is referring to style in that paragraph."

> True: one paragraph out of four and a quarter pages. Except for that one clearly labeled digression, the whole chapter is about Bradbury's subject—as the title makes clear: "When I Was In Kneepants: Ray Bradbury."

3. That when the name Nathan first appears, style is being discussed; therefore that when the name Nathan appears again, style is again being discussed.

> Loony logic— a *non sequitur.*
>
> On the jacket flap of Bradbury's 1950 collection, *"The Martian Chronicles"*, Herschel Brickell is quoted as saying about one of Bradbury's stories, "...invokes the shades of Irving, Poe, and Hawthorne..." Now, I doubt if it ever entered Mr. Brickell's head to compare Bradbury's style with Irving's, Poe's or Hawthorne's; it certainly never entered mine. The obvious thing that the three writers have in common is their choice of subject—they all wrote spook stories. Brickell was evidently saying that Bradbury wrote spook stories, too, which is true enough, but it seemed to me an annoyingly superficial comparison.
>
> So I wrote:
>
> "Learned opinion to the contrary, Bradbury is not the heir of Poe, Irving or Hawthorne; his voice is the voice (a little shriller) of Christopher Morley and Robert Nathan and J. D. Salinger."
>
> In reply to Moskowitz's earlier attack, I explained that these three are all "nostalgic, childhood-obsessed writers," and that in

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terms of his real subject Bradbury seems much closer to them than to the other gang. Moskowitz will not have it; he insists that I must be talking about style all the time, and asks:

4. "Why not Mark Twain... Charles Dickens...Booth Tarkington?"

Because all three saw the subject of childhood only as a fruitful source of literary material, comic or pathetic. For Morley, Nathan, Salinger and Bradbury, childhood is a lost paradise: the subject is obsessive, and shows through even when they write about adults ("the buried child-in-man"). It gives a distinctive yearning, nostalgic tone to their work. For salient examples, see Morley's *"Thunder On the Left"* and *"Where the Blue Begins"*, Nathan's *"The Barly Fields"*, Salinger's *"The Catcher In the Rye"* or any of his short stories.

5. "I cannot conceive of a *subject* being shriller but a *style* could be."

This sounds plausible, but is sophistry. Bradbury's style, as Moskowitz keeps saying, shows the influence of Hemingway's and Wolfe's; but he certainly doesn't speak with the voice of either, let alone both. My allusion was, of course, to Genesis *xxvii*, 22: "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." If I had been talking about style rather than subject, I would have had to say "the hand (a little hairier)..." or something of that sort.

Let me now give the rest of that final paragraph, which

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Moskowitz rightly calls a summation of the chapter. This is the part he did not see fit to quote:

"As his talent expands, some of his stories become social commentary; some are surprisingly effective religious tracts, disguised as science fiction; others still are nostalgic vignettes; but under it all is still Bradbury the poet of 20th-century neurosis, Bradbury the isolated spark of consciousness, awake and alone at midnight; Bradbury the grown-up child who still remembers, still believes."

DAMON KNIGHT,
106 W. Ann Street,
Milford, Pike Co,
Penna.

For the benefit of those who came in late, this discussion centers around a speech Sam Moskowitz gave at the 1956 Philadelphia Conference, where he ably proved, with extensive quotations, that Ray Bradbury's style bears no resemblance to the styles of Nathan, Morley, and Salinger. Thus far, there's no argument.

However, the whole purpose of this dissertation, Sam stated, was to disprove something that Damon Knight had stated in his book, *"In Search of Wonder"*, namely, that Bradbury's style derives from the three above-mentioned authors, and that he might be considered as having chosen them as his literary ancestors.

Knight contended, and continues to assert, that he made no such statement or implication in his chapter on Bradbury—that, in fact, in linking Bradbury with the three authors above, he was noting a resemblance in choice of subject matter, not a similarity of style. Therefore, says Knight, Moskowitz' charge is based upon a mis-reading.

My own opinion for what it may be worth is that even if Damon agreed with Sam's reading, he still did not do what Moskowitz says he did and such an interpretation cannot legitimately be drawn from what is actually there in the book.

FURTHER QUESTION OF ROTATION

Dear Sir:

I am writing to you now on the vexing question of whether a satellite presenting the same face to its primary (ie Earth-Moon, Sun-Mercury) has in fact got a period of rotation. I will begin by admitting that both Miss Granant and Mr. Silverberg (*Future* No. 33) have established opinion on their side, but I disagree completely with them.

My argument is based on

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the fact that a planet or satellite which is rotating on its axis has considerable less "g" at the the equator than at its poles, due to the centrifugal force of rotation. The question I would like to ask is:

Would you expect "g" to vary on the Moon and Mercury due to this "rotation" you have detected?

R. A. ENGLISH,
5 Haig Road,
Moorends, North Doncaster,
Yorkshire, England

We have turned your question over to Dr. Macklin, whose reply appears below.

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Dear Mr. English:

In order to explain this, let's first get it straight exactly what the problem is.

Luna, Earth's largest satellite, revolves in an orbit about the Earth at a mean distance of 236,860 miles, keeping the same side towards the Earth at all times. (There are slight fluctuations, known as the libration of the Moon, which allow 59% of the Moon's surface to be seen, instead of the 50% which one would suppose. For now, we'll disregard that—but come back to it later.) The question is: If the moon always shows us the same face, can it be said to rotate on its axis? And, if so, would one expect centrifugal force to show this rotation by lessening the Moon's gravitational pull at the equator?

The answer to both questions is: *Yes.* Let's see why.

Imagine yourself sitting on a planet of one of the nearer stars with a super-hyper electrocosmic telescope, looking at our Luna. You have noth-

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ing better to do, so you've stocked up on sandwiches and beer and you're going to spend a month or so watching. (Your planet really *doesn't* rotate, so you can always keep your scope on the Moon.)

When you first see it, the Moon is on the opposite side of the Earth from you, so, naturally, you'll see the same face that we poor Earthbound louts do. As time passes, the Moon goes around Earth until it's on the same side of its primary as you are. Now, you can see the other side of it, while the boys on Earth are still looking at the same old side as always.

A friend of yours comes in one day and says: "Hey, Mac, does that Moon of Earth's rotate?"

"Sure," you say, "it rotates once on its axis every 27.32166 days—give or take a little. That's how often I see Tycho come over the horizon."

But since you aren't on that hypothetic planet with that miraculous telescope, just try this stunt. Put a chair in the middle of your living room and ask a friend to walk slowly around it, always keeping his eyes on the chair. Then you stand off and watch. You'll see that, besides going in a circle, he also rotates, since you'll see his nose when he's on the opposite side of the chair from you, and the back of his head when he's between you and the chair. And how could that be unless he was turning round?

The libration of the Moon, which I mentioned before, *appears to us* as a slight wobble of the satellite which shows a little more of the surface than exactly half. This effect is due to the fact that the *rotation* of the Moon about its axis is constant, while the speed of its *revolution* about Earth varies. The orbit of the Moon is not a circle, but an ellipse, and the satellite moves faster when it is closer to Earth than when it is farther away. It is only the *average* velocity of revolution which exactly compensates for the rotation.

Could the centrifugal force generated by this rotation be detected? Well, it couldn't be done from here, no. And even if you were on the Moon itself, you'd find such detection a touchy job. The difference in gravitational pull is very slight because the Moon rotates so slowly. At the Moon's equator, you'd weigh about one one-hundred-thousandth of one percent less than at the poles!

But the effect would be there, nonetheless. Unless, of course, our theories of physics are pretty badly off, and neither Isaac Newton nor Albert Einstein knew what he was talking about.

RICHARD H. MACKLIN, Ph.D.

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Yesterday's World of Tomorrow: 1928

(*continued from page* 23)

choose to seek help; this choice is an exercise of free will. And while some systems of psychotherapy—from the practice of religious discipline, through psychiatry, to mechanical aids which at time involve drugs—have validly claimed cures, no form of psychotherapy has cured a sufferer *against* his will.

THIS, THEN, is the fallacy of the "magic drug" which makes a saint out of the worst sinner, a solid citizen out of the habitual criminal. Free will can be weakened, and at times made ineffective by such things—just consider the effectiveness of brain-washing, for example—but taking pills won't improve anyone's morals willy nilly.

Of course, you can always claim, "Well, the point is that no one really *wants* to do evil, and such aids only remove the obstructions—help make the person realize things he didn't know, and assist him in implementing the choice he really wanted." Fair enough, but most stories of saintliness serums, etc., make no such point at all.

The February issue contained a story by a then-new author, David H. Keller, MD. "Revolt of the Pedestrians" was a new direction in a number of ways. It was the first "if this goes on" story written for the magazine, and the style was markedly different for its time in science fiction.

Dr. Keller wrote in a simple, direct manner, dealing with unnatural events in a natural manner; his characters were ordinary people who thought and acted in ordinary ways. After a steady diet of the artificial, post-Victorian rhetoric, stereotyped heroes and heroines and professors of most science fiction written at that time, Keller's tales often

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seemed much better than they were. Some of them were, and still are, excellent stories; others suffer from an excess of the author's virtues, and some are just ridiculous.

EVERYBODY in the world does not talk and think in the vocabulary, mannerisms, and platitudes of a cracker-barrel philosopher, but it would be a real task to find someone in a Keller story who doesn't. Keller was much concerned with what he called "beauty" in his writing, and at times his simplicity achieved this; too often, however, what the author thought was simple was just simpleminded. Nonetheless, his influence on science fiction writing was a beneficial one and his stories are worth study. One does not have to imitate the failures and the nonsense, and no amount of failure and nonsense can detract from the successes. One story does not write down another, nor is merit corrupted by anything in its neighborhood. And if you read "The Revolt of the Pedestrians" after a bout with Austin Hall...

The odds against the "if this goes on" story are tremendous yet such tales remain a cornerstone of science fiction. In 1928, "Revolt of The Pedestrians" may have sounded like an unpleasant possible future; now, we know that it didn't happen, and isn't likely to happen. And there's a suggestion of Lysenkoism in the Automobilists. The author should have remembered that centuries of female foot-binding in China did not result in girls being born with abnormally tiny feet.

"The Disintegrating Ray", by David M. Speaker was sound and sober compared to disintegrating ray stories to follow. Speaker was aware that fission of the atom would release tremendous heat and pressure; his device actually was intended to transmute metals, rather than destroy matter completely, as did the host of rays in stories that came later. Radioactive emanation wasn't considered. I can't chide the author, though, as I think of innumerable tales where yellow (or some other color) rays caress an object which straightway disappears, without heat, without shock waves, without radiation. Matter is just disintegrated, you see, whiff!—into free atoms, or absolute nothingness!

IN THE *QUARTERLY*, "The Moon of Doom" by Earl J. Bell was the first story of the moon's swinging in to Earth. Some of the effects are valid enough—the monstrous tides, the alteration of Earth's rotation and shifting of the

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axis—but the author had apparently never heard of Roche's limit. We also have the Moon capturing Earth's atmosphere; then a remnant of humanity flies to the moon in "atoplanes" since there's a path of air between Earth and Moon...

There weren't very many such stories in following years, but offhand I think they all followed pretty much the same pattern—at the end, the moon would crash into Earth. (I'm not including the semi-article "The End of the Moon" which appeared in *Science Fiction*+.)

In Frank Orndoff's "The Terrors of the Upper Air", two aviators out to beat the world's altitude record suddenly report:

> "... We are now flying above a floating island of vegetable substance while around us and above us are hundreds of other floating islands of the same substance. I have managed to catch a handful of the substance as it floated in the air between larger bodies of the same thing.
>
> "It is nearly transparent, but has a pale greenish color. It is spongy and tough, being made up of a rubber-like material full of thousands of small gas pockets. It must be the gas that

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keeps it afloat at this great height. It grows on long rope-like branches like sea-kelp or some kind of moss. What we took for clouds were great masses of this plant matted together and floating about. I believe we could walk on these islands, but it would be impossible to land our aeroplane for it would sink too deep to get it out again..."

HOWEVER, the explorers crash on the island when their plane is attacked by monstrous winged saurians, and they observe battles between various octopus and alligator-like creatures. They don't say whether these creatures are also filled with little gas pockets. In the end, the broadcast breaks off suddenly, and we are left to wonder whether the whole thing is a hoax. Two other planes found no "updraft" such as the two explorers reported—which was responsible for their getting up to the vicinity of the floating islands.

There were various tales of flights to other planets—by means of weird rays involving magnetic repulsion, and so forth—but no rockets in the first three issues of 1928's science fiction magazines. The rocket had yet to win acceptance in science fiction. RAWL

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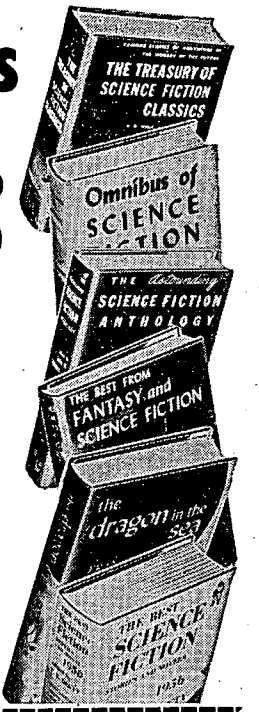
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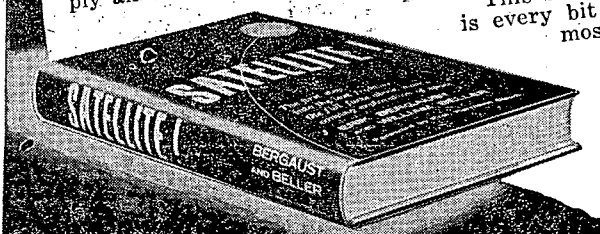

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